Inventing the Working Parent

Work, Gender, and Feminism in Neoliberal Britain

Sarah E. Stoller

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SARAH E. STOLLER

The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England

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For my parents: Victoria George and Stephen Stoller

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While writing this book, I became a parent. I finished the dissertation version of the project in the frightening month of April 2020 while seven months pregnant with my daughter. It is one thing to write and think about parenthood and quite another to experience the tangle of challenges and joys it brings firsthand. I could never have anticipated the intense love and pride I feel as a parent. Phoebe and Thomas, you are truly the most interesting, funny, delightful beings. I am amazed by you both every day and cannot believe my luck that I get to be your mama.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2004, the American psychologist Daphne de Marneffe penned a book with a stirring premise. Drawing on her clinical observations, she argued that for a certain group of contemporary, middle-class women in the West, the desire to mother had become a kind of taboo. In a world where many women now derived socioeconomic status as much from their success in the market economy as from their role in families, the desire to have and care for children could seem like a form of self-sabotage. For these women, de Marneffe suggested, maternal desire had become a source of psychological embarrassment—something to compartmentalize and downplay in service of attaining effectiveness in the world through waged work. De Marneffe's argument was poignant in the early years of the millennium, and it has only become more so since. The first quarter of the twenty-first century has in many ways been a period of strain for families amid the escalation of the climate crisis, the entrenchment of neoliberal social policy, and most recently the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, it has only become harder to articulate where parenting and the bonds of care more broadly fit in our collective systems of values.

And yet the notion that some working mothers would feel embarrassed by their maternal desires in the year 2000 would have been nearly unthinkable only a half-century earlier. In 1951, the British psychologist John Bowlby famously argued that children deprived of adequate maternal attention would incur lasting damage.[1] In the process, he rendered working mothers suspect. A mother employed for pay in the 1950s in Britain or the United States would almost certainly have felt more pressure to justify her hours away from home and family than the opposite.

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The late twentieth century saw a sea change in the perception of working mothers across the developed world. However, the rise of middle-class, dual-income households since the 1970s has not been matched with a corresponding revolution in the gendered division of labor or with a significant extension of social support for families. In Anglo-America, social infrastructure and public policy have continued to operate on the assumption that all families can depend on a full-time caregiver, probably a mother, in the home. The recent pandemic has made glaringly clear the flaws of this assumption as school and childcare closures profoundly upset care for children and other members of our communities. But the crisis of care we now inhabit so intensely is not new. It represents the culmination of a period of rapid reorganization of everyday life and of the expectations we bring to it—many of them contradictory—since the 1970s. This book explores this period of change, and the tangle of work and family demands and pleasures that we continue to live with, through the lens of what became known as working parenthood.

Long before the 1970s, men and women with children worked for pay. This was, of course, particularly true of working-class parents. But it was only alongside the rapid expansion of middle-class mothers' participation in the paid workforce in the postwar years that the issue rose to cultural prominence in Britain. As Helen McCarthy has argued, the postwar economic boom began to normalize working motherhood by eroding the moral distinction between mothers needing and wanting to work for pay.[2] By the early 1960s, social scientists had started to refute Bowlby's claims about the supposed dangers that working mothers posed to their children.

In the 1970s, a new generation of social scientists turned their attention to something novel: the dynamics of the growing numbers of so-called dual-career households.[3] Their research highlighted men's as well as women's experiences of work and home and raised questions about the organization of household labor and parenting. What researchers initially described in these years as the dilemmas facing dual-career couples were soon more often framed as the challenges of working parenthood. The figure of the working mother had dominated popular discourse about the issue of mothers as joint breadwinners in the context of Britain's midcentury social welfare state. By the 1970s, the working parent emerged as a new figure distinct from, though always overlapping with, the working mother before it. Talk of working parents allowed commentators to not only discuss

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mothers' paid work but also capture the realities of a very different era characterized by new aspirations for women's and men's equality in marital as well as professional life. In the late 1970s, talk of the challenges facing working parents was still a minority, principally academic concern in Britain. But only a decade later, nearly the opposite was the case.

By the late 1980s, commentators well beyond academia—in the media, business, and increasingly government—were declaring that a revolution had taken place in British work and family life. The new figure of the working parent seemed to capture a set of profound transformations in gender relations, the family, the cultures of work and home, and the economy across the tumultuous 1980s. By the early 1990s, stories about job-sharing couples and parental labor trends filled the pages of employment and personnel journals and national newspapers ranging from the *Daily Mail* to the *Guardian* and *Financial Times*, as often as they did parenting magazines and advice literature. Discussions about the dilemmas faced by working occurred everywhere from charitable and government offices and union meetings to boardrooms and bedrooms.

While it was the postwar demand for women's labor that first began to reduce the stigma around mothers' paid work, it was the feminism of the 1970s and 1980s that powerfully linked mothers' work to new demands for equality between the sexes. Under the broad umbrella of the women's movement, activists both advocated for women's rights to participate in paid work on equal terms with men and critiqued the potential of work as it actually existed to deliver on women's emancipation. In activist networks, feminists articulated the challenges confronting workers with caring responsibilities on an unprecedented scale and organized consistently for the first time on behalf of a group called "working parents" in the hopes of addressing lagging social attitudes and the lack of institutional support for families.

The emergence of feminist activism on behalf of working parents corresponded with a moment of profound political and economic change. Following the collapse of Bretton Woods and the 1973 oil crisis, a new neoliberal political economy took shape across the globe.[4] In Britain, activists were compelled to reckon with and imagine a future for work and family alongside the rise of Thatcherism.[5] The rapid restructuring of the deindustrializing British economy further increased the importance of women's paid work. Meanwhile, the reimagination and restructuring of the welfare state

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heightened the challenges confronting dual-income households. Although working mothers continued to bear the brunt of the responsibility for caring for children and family, working fathers became subject to some similar pressures.

The consequences of the neoliberal turn for working parenthood in Britain are in many ways part of a transnational story. As British activists championed the need for greater institutional support for workers with caring responsibilities and reimagined the social place of caring around a new notion of parenthood as a genderless category of identity, they looked to initiatives first developed in the United States for answers. Employers and policy makers later followed suit. As new ideas about flexible work and a growing emphasis on private childcare solutions gained traction in Britain, the UK drew ever closer to the neoliberal political economy developing across the Atlantic. And yet the state remained more deeply entwined with family life in Britain than in the United States, and activists and policy makers also looked to European social practice as a model.

This book tells the story of the invention of working parenthood in Britain within this broader Euro-American context. It begins with the first sustained efforts to mobilize politically on behalf of working parents in feminist circles in the late 1970s and concludes in the context of an emerging national political agenda for working families with the rise of New Labour in the 1990s. It explores how and why the notion of working parenthood emerged as a powerful new political claim and identity category, gradually displacing the language and politics of working motherhood prevalent in earlier decades. It addresses how feminists used the concept of working parenthood to advocate for new organizational policies and practices and considers how this activism shaped and was in turn shaped by its confrontation with institutions both literal and cultural. Last, it illustrates how neoliberal capitalism under the Thatcher and New Labour governments made families' ability to survive on one income nearly impossible as well as the consequences of this shift for individual experience, the gendered division of labor, and intimate life.

Historians have only just begun to write the histories of labor, of gender and intimate life, and of the family in neoliberal Britain. The vast majority of historical scholarship on both the history of work and the history of the family since the Second World War centers on the early postwar period, and few historians have addressed these themes in the 1980s and

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beyond.[6] Moreover, while historians have looked extensively at the history of the family wage, and of gender and social policy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this work has yet to appear for the postwar years.[7] It has primarily been outside of the field of history that scholars have grappled with the profound shifts in work, gender, and the politics of the family since the 1970s.[8] As Melinda Cooper and Bethany Moreton have demonstrated powerfully for the American context, questions of family and gender were fundamental to the constitution and function of a neoliberal capitalist order.[9] It was foremost on the labor of working women and men that this new capitalist order was built.

Understanding the transformation of paid work and family life in the late twentieth century is also critical to making sense of the diverse and wide-ranging legacies of second-wave feminism. In recent years, Nancy Fraser's argument that there was an "elective affinity" between the politics of second-wave feminism and neoliberalism has sparked extensive debate in the social sciences.[10] Many have rushed, if not to exonerate feminism from the charge of complicity in neoliberalism, then at least to complicate Fraser's picture of feminist agency all but completely stamped out by the new political economy.[11] We are only just beginning to make sense of the multiple feminisms that flourished in the 1970s and of the varied ways that feminist politics, ideas, and practices entered into, remade and were remade by the broader worlds of politics, government, business, and culture. By tracing the history of the working parent, we can follow the trajectory of one critical set of feminist aspirations, political claims, and practices forged at the complex intersection between work and family life into the neoliberal era. The history of the working parent is ultimately a story of the various fates of feminist politics and possibilities—including those lived in the day-to-day—across the last three decades of the twentieth century.

I. A NEW POLITICAL ECONOMY AND CRISIS OF CARE

The dramatic restructuring of the British economy and state in the second half of the twentieth century was foundational to the invention of working parenthood in Britain. In recent years, historians have documented Britain's deindustrialization and its profound consequences for the labor market as well as for men's and women's experiences of both work and unemployment.[12] Jim Tomlinson has argued persuasively that deindustrialization was

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the defining feature of Britain's experience of the late twentieth century.[13] Meanwhile, the historiography of neoliberalism in Britain has been in a state of flux. Historians have long focused on the development of neoliberal political ideology and its gradual ascendancy via think tanks into the ranks of high politics culminating under Margaret Thatcher. Only recently have they begun to distinguish neoliberalism from Thatcherism; to raise questions about its economic, social, and cultural dimensions; and to consider its more uneven history and trajectory into the 1990s and beyond.[14] As historians have begun for the first time to consider neoliberalism's family and gender politics, they have tended to replay an emphasis on ideology and high politics. This focus has obscured the significance of neoliberal policy and practice around family outside the walls of government and its consequences for everyday life, work, and governance more broadly.[15]

Both the economic process of deindustrialization from the 1950s and the neoliberal political economy that took shape in Britain beginning in the 1970s drove the crisis confronting the group later known as working parents. In the late 1950s, deindustrialization began to transform the British economy and to restructure the labor market, displacing many middle-income jobs. The years that followed saw the proliferation of highly skilled high-income work on the one hand and unskilled low-wage service work on the other.[16] Declining state support for manufacturing from the 1970s accelerated these changes. By the early 1980s, the decline of manufacturing had led to widespread unemployment that hit immigrant communities the hardest.[17] Alongside the erosion of traditionally male industrial work, the historically female-dominated service industry grew rapidly, fueling the expansion of women's paid work. In this context, Thatcher's targeted cuts to public infrastructure and welfare programs beginning in the early 1980s contributed to a mounting crisis of care. As we will see, the national government's persistent inaction in addressing this crisis paved the way for political actors ranging from feminist activists, charities, and local government to British and multinational corporations to enter into a conversation about the needs of working parents.

Together, the processes of deindustrialization and neoliberalization enormously increased the importance of women's paid work in this period. The rising costs of living and declining real wages that accompanied the transformation of Britain's economy saw the erosion of the male-breadwinner family wage. Households increasingly depended upon additional earning

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to support their standard of living. In 1976, around a quarter of women with preschool-aged children were working—already more than double the figure just fifteen years earlier.[18] Between 1975 and 2015, the overall share of employed working-age mothers in Britain rose from 50 to 72 percent. The increase was particularly pronounced for single mothers and mothers of preschool and primary school-age children. Over the same period, the proportion of dual-wage-earning households with children rose from 49 to 68 percent.[19]

Meanwhile, the dominant pattern of women's working lives in Britain also shifted. Previously, a majority of women had withdrawn from paid work upon marriage, but by the 1950s, growing numbers of women continued to work in early marriage, leaving paid work after having their first child, and in many instances reentering when their children were of school age or had left home.[20] In the 1980s and 1990s, this pattern in turn gave way to one that saw mothers returning to paid work far sooner after the birth of their children. Of women born in 1958, just 41 percent were still in paid work two years after the birth of their first child. Of women born in 1970, 58 percent remained in paid work over this same timeframe.[21] According to one study, during the 1980s, the number of women who returned to paid employment within nine months of having a baby in Britain almost doubled.[22] While similar transformations were evident elsewhere in the West in this period, the speed of the transformation in Britain was particularly dramatic. Between 1985 and 1991, the growth in rates of employment for women with children under ten in Britain were among the fastest of any country in the European Union.[23]

As women participated in paid work in ever higher numbers, they continued to be employed primarily in the lower-paid, female-dominated sectors of the economy—personal services, clerical, health, education, welfare, and sales.[24] Vertical segregation also persisted, with women remaining underrepresented in top professional and managerial jobs, in supervisory grades, and among business owners.[25] To combine earning with household responsibilities, for which women remained disproportionately responsible, many mothers who entered paid work in this period did so on a part-time basis. This work tended to be both low paying and low in prestige.[26] In 1971, there were two million more female part-time workers in Britain than had been the case in 1951.[27] By the mid-1980s, 45 percent of women in the labor force were employed part time, whereas only 7 percent of working

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men were.[28] But while part-time paid work was a reality for growing numbers of mothers, so too was full-time employment. In the 1980s, half of the growth in employment rates for mothers was in full-time work.[29] Of course, even where women were employed full time in comparable roles to men, the gendered pay gap that persisted into the twenty-first century meant that women earned less for the same work.[30]

Despite the relatively disadvantaged position of women in the labor market, the new political economy privileged some female economic actors over others.[31] While the demand for low-skilled work increased in this period, so too, with the birth of a knowledge economy, did the demand for highly skilled workers. From the 1960s onward, middle-class women were the key beneficiaries of the expanding access to higher education in Britain that followed from the Robbins Report, and in subsequent years, growing numbers of skilled women entered the workforce.[32] Meanwhile, alongside the rise of women's work, mounting political pressure from women's rights activists and trade unions led to new equal opportunities legislation in Britain. The introduction of the Equal Pay Act in 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975, precipitated by Britain's entry into the European Economic Community, were part of a broader transnational spate of legislative change in Euro-America that had critical consequences for women's professional opportunities, even while their full agendas remain to this day unfulfilled.[33]

Following the introduction of equalities legislation, industrial training boards, first established by the government in the mid-1960s to address concerns about developing a skilled workforce, began to consider the issue of women's training and progression at work. The new legislation also forced companies to take a more active role in addressing inequality in the workplace or risk legal action from growing ranks of female workers. Concerns about maintaining a skilled workforce in the face of economic change were critical in drawing new corporate and government attention to the challenges confronting women workers; however, this was a highly uneven process that was contingent on the ups and downs of the labor market. It was also one that continually saw the needs of working-class women overlooked in favor of concern for the most highly trained workers.

Across the board, women's entry into paid work of all kinds in the context of a restructured British economy and cuts to welfare programs produced a mounting crisis of care by the late 1970s. As ever more women

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sought childcare support to enable them to enter the paid workforce, state childcare provision in fact declined.[34] In 1975, there were only five free nursery places for every one thousand preschool-aged children in Britain. While there were more than nine hundred state nurseries in Britain in 1949, by 1970 there were under five hundred.[35] Feminist demands for greater support for workers with caring responsibilities emerged in tandem with the government's retreat not just from nursery provision but also from all categories of social and welfare spending—cuts that feminists were quick to point out hit women hardest.[36] As we will see, even as progressive ideas about the needs of working parents gradually made inroads into public sector workplaces during the 1980s, they were tested by targeted political cuts to local government spending. It was increasingly political actors outside of government who set the terms of discussion about support for British families where the state did not.[37] Indeed, it was only in the mid-1990s that childcare secured a central place on the national political agenda.

II. FAMILY LIFE

While the transformation of Britain's political economy in the late twentieth century was foundational to the invention of working parenthood, so too were changes already underway in family life. Beginning in the 1950s, men's and women's aspirations and gendered expectations were notably shifting, with important consequences for both marriage and parenting. Although it is impossible to assess the precise motivations of mothers for assuming more paid work in the postwar years, the desire to work as well as the financial need to do so undoubtedly played a role. Angela Davis's oral history research suggests that in the postwar period some mothers saw paid work as opportunity for financial independence and a break from domesticity as well as a matter of family sustenance.[38] In practice, as Helen McCarthy has argued, the expansion of married women's paid work in the 1950s and 1960s granted growing numbers of women a degree of financial autonomy from their husbands, however minimal, which began to alter the power dynamics of marital relationships.[39]

At the same time, the sanctity of marriage itself became the subject of new public skepticism in these years. By the 1960s, there was a growing movement to reform divorce law in Britain and to render loveless marriage a thing of the past.[40] In 1969, no-fault divorce became a reality, and in the

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years that followed the marriage rate plummeted while the rates of divorce, cohabitation, and single parenthood grew dramatically.[41] The sense that marriage in Britain was changing prompted new anxieties about gender relations and the stability of families. The growth of Britain's immigrant population simultaneously contributed to a racialized notion that "traditional" family life in Britain was on the decline—a view that conservative politicians were happy to trade on in the decades to come.[42]

Alongside the transformation of marriage and its place in British society, the midcentury was also an important moment of change in parenting. Laura King has documented the growing expectations of men as fathers from the mid-1930s onward and the rise of a "family-oriented masculinity" in the postwar period. In the context of Britain's postwar affluence, new ideals of fatherhood envisioned men as more than just material providers for families: they were also expected to be key figures for children's healthy psychological development. Fatherhood consequently achieved a new social and cultural status by the 1950s and 1960s, but so too did motherhood.[43] The midcentury saw an intensification of parenting for both men and women that would only continue across the remainder of the century.[44] By the 1960s, fathers had become more involved in the affective life of families, and gender differences in parental involvement in childcare narrowed.[45] Nevertheless, fathers were neither culturally nor legally considered caregivers on equal terms with mothers—something that father's rights activists would begin to challenge on a widespread scale only in the 1990s.[46]

Moreover, by the 1970s, the reality remained that women continued to do the vast majority of childcare and other kinds of domestic work in British households. Evidence from time-use studies suggests that men in Britain and elsewhere in the West were assuming a larger share of routine household work in this period, though the extent of this shift is subject to debate.[47] According to one estimate, between 1965 and 2003, British men's participation in domestic work, excluding childcare, rose by 50 percent, with most this increase occurring before the 1980s.[48] The timing of this shift suggests that the trend toward family-oriented masculinity in the midcentury may have been important in affecting a change in men's behavior in households generally as well as in fathering specifically.[49]

Despite some narrowing in the domestic gendered division of labor, it was only in the context of the women's liberation movement (WLM) of the 1970s that the ongoing inequality within families came into political focus

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and helped to generate new demands on behalf of working parents. By the time feminists began to mobilize to challenge the gendered division of labor both at work and at home, the new economic pressures on British families had already rendered the issue of women's and men's time an increasingly pressing one. But so too had men's and women's shifting expectations and behaviors regarding marriage and parenting. The notion of an ostensibly genderless working parent articulated in feminist circles beginning in the late 1970s depended upon three decades of gradual change in attitudes toward men's and women's respective roles in intimate and family life.

III. SECOND-WAVE FEMINISM

A political agenda surrounding the figure of the working parent in Britain came about for the first time in the context of the WLM. While historians have addressed the women's movements' major campaigns regarding paid work, and more recently the movement's contribution to exposing the invisibility of household labor, they have yet to explore the full range of feminist thought and organizing at the intersection of paid and unpaid work.[50] It is also only very recently that historians have begun to consider the long history of feminist activism into the 1980s and beyond, and its legacies.[51] Second-wave feminism in Britain encompassed an enormous range of groups, campaigns, and projects with distinct foci.[52] The activism that emerged around the needs of working parents from the 1970s had strains both utopian and pragmatic, often within the context of individual campaigns and projects. The consequences of this activism have been tremendously wide-ranging in ways that belie discrete assessments of its political success or failure.

The 1960s and 1970s were a critical period of new aspirations for British women. This was particularly the case for middle-class women born during the postwar baby boom who benefited from the expanding system of higher education.[53] These young women entered the workforce in the 1970s alongside the introduction of the very equal pay and sex discrimination legislation intended to ensure their participation on equal footing with men. As one activist remembered of her experience, "we all thought that the equal opportunities movement was done and dusted . . . and then we found that actually things were still really tough."[54] Working mothers of all backgrounds had long found meaning through paid work.[55] In the

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1970s, paid work became an increasingly important source of identity—particularly for growing numbers of educated, middle-class women. It was these women who aspired not only to break from domesticity or even to gain financial independence from their husbands but increasingly also to find meaningful and interesting careers.

For many of these women, the experience of trying to combine paid work with family responsibilities was acutely difficult and frustrating. The expectation that women would be responsible for childrearing and other household affairs meant that they endured what feminists began to characterize as a second shift in the paid workplace and at home.[56] By the mid-1970s, women meeting through left activism and in consciousness-raising groups began to articulate powerful critiques of women's experiences in paid work, of marital relationships and the gendered division of labor, and of the lack of social concern for the challenges facing workers with caring responsibilities. They also began to organize both on a self-help basis and as campaigning groups on behalf of the concerns of working mothers and working parents.

While there had certainly been activism on behalf of working mothers in Britain previously, the logic behind the demands emerging from the women's movement in the late 1970s were fundamentally new.[57] Working parents who began to organize politically in these years aimed not simply to fill in the gaps of inadequate welfare provision, as had often been the case previously, but to compel both the state and employers to pursue altogether new solutions. Moreover, activists were concerned as much with the division of labor at home and with men's roles as they were with the conditions of paid work for women. They increasingly used the language of working parenthood, even as they also continued to speak in the older language of working motherhood, to make the case that the challenges of combining paid work with other responsibilities were as relevant to men as to women. In the process, they set in motion the possibility that the dilemmas facing dual-career households were not merely concerns for mothers but for all Britons. The notion of a genderless working parent intended to emphasize that the shared responsibilities of men and women for care in society ultimately proved capable of obscuring as much as highlighting the unequal division of caring work.

Nonetheless, the feminist vision first articulated in the 1970s of a society that supported working parents was a radical one. It aimed at eliminating the gendered division of labor both at home and at work and restructuring

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the family as a means of liberation from patriarchal, capitalist oppression. The needs of working parents were understood as the needs of communities. Historians and contemporary commentators alike have, at times, overlooked second-wave feminism's radical, and indeed often intersectional, critique of labor and the politics of reproduction in light of the compromises of feminism in the neoliberal era.

IV. INVENTING THE WORKING PARENT

The now ubiquitous figure of the working parent has been one of the most enduring and influential legacies of second-wave feminism. The ideas about working parenthood that took shape in the context of the feminist reimagination of work and intimate life ultimately traveled far from those roots. While in the 1970s activism on behalf of working parents was the prerogative of small networks of women and community activists, in the 1980s a wide range of actors on the local and national scale, including trade unions, the charitable sector, local and national government, and private companies, came to concern themselves with working parents—in large part due to the agency of feminists working in these varied institutional contexts.

Over the same period, the notion of working parenthood likewise traveled from a left-wing, predominately white middle-class women's milieu to a much broader demographic of Britons via new workplace policies, advice literature, and the mass media. The invention and reinvention of working parenthood as it became embedded in charitable organizations, in workplace policy, and in popular culture in the last three decades of the twentieth century has had profound consequences for the contemporary cultures of work, family, and selfhood. This book tells that story.

It begins with the origins of working parenthood as a new identity category and political claim in the feminist childcare and labor activism of the 1970s. Chapters 1 and 2 look at how the demand for greater support for a group called "working parents" in Britain was articulated as part of a radical vision of liberation for individuals and communities, and explore the foundational compromises that shaped the practice of feminist activism in neoliberalizing Britain.

In many ways the single problem that most centrally defined the figure of the working parent was the issue of childcare. Chapter 1 considers how, in the absence of comprehensive state provision, feminists and community

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activists of a variety of class and ethnic backgrounds shaped a new vision for community-based childcare. Although activists came together on a wide scale in the 1970s and early 1980s, conflicts over the role of the state, of professionals, and of racial discrimination in childcare were divisive. In the early 1980s, as welfare budgets came under strain, these tensions rose to the surface in Britain's most influential childcare campaigns and organizations. To survive in a shifting landscape, in the mid-1980s, childcare activists began to redirect demands for childcare support from the state to the private sector and to speak a language of diversity rather than to emphasize the issues of community and racial and class integration. At the same time, activists who had long campaigned on behalf of childcare to support women's liberation began to speak about the needs of the gender-neutral category of parents and the apparently apolitical category of children.

Chapter 2 considers feminist activism for more flexible forms of work. From the late 1970s onward, activists who had struggled to combine professional work with parenthood campaigned for the implementation of then largely unprecedented policies such as flexible hours and job sharing. They initially did so as part of campaign networks and, increasing by the early 1980s, through the apparatus of unions and new charities. Feminist calls for greater support for working parents in these years were intended to transform the gendered division of labor at home as well as to reform the world of paid work for all women. In practice, effective campaigning on behalf of the concerns of working parents in an era of dwindling funding for activist projects, Conservative labor policies, rising economic insecurity, and a changing role for unions required difficult compromises. In this context, activists gradually shifted away from some of the more utopian and socialist currents of labor activism.

The compromises that feminists made as they continued to campaign for support for working parents on the evolving political-economic terrain of the 1980s were reflected in the earliest systematic efforts in Britain to respond to the activism of working parents with new policies in the paid workplace. Chapter 3 looks outward from local government—considered through the case study of the London Borough of Camden—where feminist calls for a more equitable gendered division of labor and workplace equality were taken up and embedded in an innovative equal opportunities employment framework beginning in the early 1980s. Camden introduced some of Britain's first policies on behalf of working parents, but over the course

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of the 1980s, dwindling economic resources and mounting political pressure from Thatcher's government eroded the London Borough's commitment to equality. Feminists nonetheless continued to advance an agenda of gender, racial, and socioeconomic equality. Eventually, Camden turned to American managerial practices to rationalize its spending. Ultimately, the public sector's innovative efforts on behalf of working parents became less significant alongside a more enduring reimagination of the working parent underway within the private sector.

Chapter 4 asks what drove the emergence of "family-friendly" private sector workplaces that claimed to address the needs of working parents. I highlight the example of NatWest Bank, which in the early 1980s became the first major British corporation to introduce policies aimed at retaining skilled female employees in response to both shifting economies in the banking sector and to the activism of a small group of feminist academics with American financial backing. By the late 1980s, a wide array of British companies had begun to introduce family-friendly policies in response to demographic predictions about women's growing importance in the workforce.

In practice, although these policies did create new possibilities for some working families, they did far less to change the experience of paid work or the gendered division of labor than feminists had hoped. They tended to support capitalist expansion and facilitated the construction of a new culture in which the concerns of affective life entered the paid workplace. In the process, the private sector helped to redefine the notion of working parenthood for the public, stripping it of much of its initial political force. It was ironically as a result of this depoliticization that the concerns of working parents became a palatable subject for national political leadership under New Labour.

If feminists inadvertently helped to legitimize a new consensus that saw business interests become the leading force in shaping policy for working parents, the invention of the figure of the working parent also had wide-reaching cultural consequences. In the 1990s, the idealized working parent became an omnipresent aspirational figure in popular culture. Chapter 5 asks how and why a group of parents that extended well beyond feminist circles identified as working parents even though the companies and politicians that now spoke this language had failed to deliver on the needs of working families. Ultimately, the idealized figure of the working parent as

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it appealed in popular culture—as a white middle-class mother—was one far from the reality of life for most Britons. And yet the language of working parenthood allowed Britons of a variety of backgrounds to express their hopes for better and more secure working lives, more equal marriages, and happier families.

At the same time, talk of working parenthood enabled men and women to articulate the stress and strain of trying to do and have it all in an era of heightened expectations for individual success. In the popular culture of the 1990s, the figure of the working parent allowed men and women to reimagine the division of labor in paid work and in the family, much as feminists had hoped it would. However, it did so only insofar as individual households were expected to bear the burden of all caring work in the absence of collective provision for families.

The fate of working parenthood across the last three decades of the twentieth century tells the story of feminism's profoundly mixed legacies in the neoliberal era. Feminist ideas that emerged in the context of the WLM in the 1970s were at once new and progressive as well as flawed and contradictory. The radical promise of ideas such as job sharing, community-based childcare, and fully shared parenting became largely untenable in late twentieth century Britain. Throughout the 1980s, collective provision gave way to a new corporate culture in government as well as business, and the figure of the working parent in popular culture became as much a source of oppression as liberation for parents. The gendered division of labor was not revolutionized by feminist activism, nor have universal forms of social support for parents or caregivers of all socioeconomic backgrounds materialized. In many ways, and as many of those who lobbied on behalf of working parents in this period would themselves insist, we live in a world unreformed.

But the making of working parenthood was a construction not just of neoliberal political economy but also, critically, of the activists who advanced new ideas about and demands on behalf of working women and men with caring responsibilities. There is no doubt that, as Nancy Fraser has argued, feminist ideals such as flexibility that were emancipatory in the context of welfare capitalism were resignified on neoliberal terrain; however, the new neoliberal terrain was itself shaped at points of both tension and accommodation with feminist projects large and small.[58] In other words, the diverse forms of feminist activism for working parents grew up in the neoliberal era rather than being undone by it.

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In the face of new political and economic realities, an influential group of activists adapted their strategies and sought to work within capitalism, including its neoliberal form, rather than against it. In the process, business and government began to commodify the language, if not the practice, of equality and diversity. As feminists continued to organize and campaign for working parents within these conditions, their activism at times overlooked a commitment to the needs of all parents in favor of the more politically salient concerns of white middle-class professionals, though this happened unevenly and with uneven consequences. In activist circles, and later in workplaces, feminists of diverse politics exerted tremendous agency in the creation of new policies and practices that have been of enduring importance economically, politically, and culturally. It is worth considering that neoliberalism as we know it would look very different were it not for the influence of feminist activism.

At the same time as key currents of feminist activism around women's work and childcare became mainstream in the context of Britain's neoliberalization, other strands of feminist thought and practice trailed off in unexpected directions. Attending to these less obvious trajectories can help avoid the kind of totalizing accounts of both neoliberalism and feminism that make it difficult to imagine other political futures. It is perhaps surprising that some of the more utopian dreams of second-wave feminists about the reconstitution of intimate life persisted in a hopefulness about the possibilities of marriage and partnership that accompanied the cultural figure of the working parent in the 1990s. And while it is debatable whether the new acknowledgment of workers' personal and emotional lives that came about alongside the introduction of family-friendly policies in British workplaces has improved women's and men's lives and opportunities widely, it is certainly the case that it placed the traditionally female concern of family squarely at the center of contemporary debates about labor and public life.

While this book aims to do justice to the complex history of working parenthood in the last third of the twentieth century, there is also a great deal it does not cover. The first and most important omission is a comprehensive account of the experiences of working-class Britons, people of color, single people, and sexual minorities as parents. Feminist activism on behalf of working parents originated among middle- and aspirationally middle-class, predominately white women. As we will see, the distinct

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experiences of the working poor, men and women of color, single, and LGBTQ parents were often obscured by the implicit and sometimes explicit emphasis of activists, and later organizations, on remaking policy for heterosexual dual-income households.[59] This happened despite the leading role played by working-class and single women in early activism around the needs of working parents.

As working parenthood emerged as a category of political identity, women and men of color did sometimes speak about themselves in these terms—particularly in the context of demands for childcare.[60] As we will see, black community activists—some but not all of whom also identified as feminists—were involved in a wide range of campaigns for more and better childcare from the 1970s. Nonetheless, the organizing efforts of black parents as such were most often focused on protecting black children from racial discrimination in education and from police violence.[61] Likewise, while there was significant overlap between the needs and demands of single parents and working parents, separate forms of organizing and recognition developed around the activism of these families.[62] It is not possible in the context of this book to do justice to these critically important histories. It is nonetheless worth noting that the proliferation of talk about working parents in Briton by the 1990s meant that a growing demographic of working as much as middle-class Britons, many of them far removed from feminist circles, began to think about themselves and narrate their lives in the language of working parenthood.

A further omission of this book concerns relationships between parents and children. There is no question that second-wave feminists hoped to reinvent parent–child relationships and experiences of care as part of the broader remaking of families and communities. However, the notion of working parenthood that gained traction in British institutions over the course of the 1980s was largely devoid of ideas about the changing relationships between parents and children. Instead, the language of working parenthood primarily became a way of talking about the personal dilemmas facing parents with caring responsibilities. Parenting as such changed tremendously in this period, as did family economies of care in general.[63] A great deal of evidence suggests that this change involved a significant intensification of affective labor for both women and men—something that I touch on briefly in chapter 5. A much needed, more thorough treatment of this subject would also take account of new paternal anxieties and

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risk perception, as British families navigated more economically precarious lives, with a heightened sensitivity to risk, in the neoliberal era.[64]

V. SOURCES

Writing the history of working parenthood in neoliberal Britain has required working with a wide variety of sources. Most critical among these have been the voluminous and largely unexplored collections of charities that came about because of feminist activism in the 1970s, mainly Parents at Work, New Ways to Work, and the Daycare Trust. The sheer size and diversity of these collections is a testament to the sense of importance that motivated their work. It was by reading these collections that I first gained insight into the ideas and personalities that shaped the early history of working parenthood and into the public discourse that accompanied feminist activism on behalf of working parents. It was also through these collections that I came to appreciate the close relationship between feminist activism and the changes in public and private sector workplace policy that occurred throughout the 1980s. The exchanges between charities and the organizations that they worked with provided initial insights into the history of contemporary work that would otherwise have been impossible. Rather than simply recreating the narratives of these archives, I endeavored to put them in conversation with government, private employer, union, press, and personal collections.

To do so, I made my way into the wonderful archives of the London Borough of Camden and then into the world of business archives. At NatWest, Sainsbury's, and GlaxoSmithKline, I caught a glimpse into the history of private sector personnel policy and practice. This was enormously enriched by the archives of Margery Povall, whose fastidious records of her work at NatWest shed light on the progression of an equal opportunities agenda in banking. Joanna Foster's archive represents the work of a lifetime of concern for issues of equality in work. The archives of Business in the Community allowed me to think through the complex relationship between the charitable and business sectors by the 1990s. The expansive collections of the Equal Opportunities Commission, of the Trades Union Congress, and of individual unions housed at the Modern Record Centre at the University of Warwick offered rich insight into the government's equalities work and into the labor movement in this period.

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Much of the remainder of the research for this project took place outside of traditional archives. Feminist archives continue to be underappreciated and underfunded even as collections such as the British Library are increasingly investing in maintaining them. The Daycare Trust (now Coram Family and Childcare), Business in the Community, and the Professional Association for Childcare and the Early Years house their own records, and without the kindness of their staff and their own interest in feminist history, I certainly would not have been able to access them. While the archives of Parents at Work and New Ways to Work are housed at The Women's Library, they do not cover the very early history of these key organizations. It was only due to the enthusiasm and generosity of founders Pam Walton, Adrienne Boyle, and Lucy Daniels in allowing me to rummage through their personal papers in their homes, attics, and in one case canal boat, that I can tell these stories. Likewise, Pam Calder's papers covering the early history of the National Child Care Campaign proved indispensable.

The most exciting research involved in this project was without a doubt oral history interviews. Before undertaking interviews of my own, I benefited tremendously from listening to those conducted with feminist activists as part of the Heart of the Race Oral History Project at the Black Cultural Archives, and the Sisterhood at After Project at the British Library, as well as Lucy Delap's thoughtful interviews with men involved in the men's movement. When it came time for my own interviews, the lengthy conversations I had with Pam Walton, Lucy Daniels, Adrienne Boyle, Anne Watts, Margery Povall, Pam Calder, Helen Penn, Lee Comer, Di Parkin, Liz Heron, Alison Garnham, and Ursula Huws proved critical to shaping my work.

Off the record, my discussions and correspondence with Val Hammond, Caroline Waters, Carolyn McKecuen, and Jonathan Swan were equally essential. Each one of the oral histories I conducted was fascinating and moving, and a number of the interviews that were fundamental to my thinking about this project are not quoted anywhere in the book. Conducting oral history interviews was an education not just in methodology, as the internal review boards would have us believe, but in feminist and indeed human practice. To work with the feminist archive is to enter into conversation with several generations of feminists—the vast majority located outside of the academy and its adjacent institutions. This project is a testament to the long, complex legacies of their activism.

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1 WHO CARES? THE PROBLEM OF CHILDCARE FOR WORKING PARENTS

In 1977, the recently formed London Nursery Campaign published a booklet entitled "The Do-It-Yourself Nursery."[1] Written as a practical guide to setting up a community nursery, it included information on everything from activities and educational materials for children to staffing and nursery management and premises and equipment. The booklet began by asserting that national and local government should support "free, flexible, and integrated provision for young children" and emphasized that nurseries and other forms of collective childcare were "important and enjoyable for children and parents alike." They then shifted gears to address parents directly: "If you are a working parent (and married women are the most rapidly increasing group of employees) unless you are rich enough to afford an au pair or a nanny, there is not much available to you in the way of good childcare." For the women and men reading the campaign's guide, this would not have come as a surprise. The absence of, and need for, childcare was in many ways the single problem that most centrally defined the lives of working parents in Britain. By the mid-1970s, demand for childcare had reached a breaking point.

Access to childcare, like so many social goods, was shaped by a parent's class, race, gender and sexual orientation, regional location, neighborhood community, and marital and health status. And yet for all but the very wealthiest of Britons, childcare was inaccessible and profoundly inadequate. During the Second World War, the demand for women's participation in the paid workforce had spurred the creation of state nurseries.[2] At the end of the war, some 1,449 day nurseries in England and Wales were

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providing 68,574 full-time childcare places for children under school age. By 1965, the government had long since retreated from childcare provision, and just 448 nurseries offering 21,396 places remained.[3] A 1972 survey conducted in Greater London found that local authority day nurseries had places for just 1.5 percent of the region's children under five.[4]

Over the course of the 1970s, the problem of childcare assumed a growing urgency. In 1974, a national study of more than 2,500 mothers conducted by the Office of Population Census and Survey found that 90 percent of mothers of children aged three to four, and 46 percent of mothers of children under three, wanted a nursery place. Nonetheless, 58 percent of mothers reported having no regular childcare of any kind.[5] Continually rising levels of maternal employment across the decade, coupled with state social spending cuts in the wake of the 1976 International Monetary Fund bailout, heightened the childcare crisis. By 1984, only 1 percent of under-fives in Britain attended council day nurseries, and just 22 percent received part-time nursery school education.[6] Because local authorities were under no obligation to offer services, regional provision varied dramatically.[7] Across the board, in the 1970s, more and more parents sought childcare solutions on the private market, and as a result childcare providers also came under increased pressure. Growing numbers of desperate parents relied upon an informal workforce of low-wage women workers, themselves often parents, for an array of childcare services with next to no regulation and few labor protections for workers.

In the late twentieth century, the problem of finding childcare affected the vast majority of Britons—whether directly or indirectly—at some point during their working lives. This was, of course, particularly true of mothers, who continued to bear the disproportionate share of caring responsibilities in families. Even parents who did not work often desired and benefited from childcare. Despite the significance of childcare to Britons' everyday lives, its history has been largely invisible—and childcare work has correspondingly remained a category of work that doesn't seem to count. Studying the history of childcare, even in the very recent past, poses unique challenges. In the absence of a comprehensive state system for the care or education of under-fives, childcare in Britain encompassed an exceptionally diverse patchwork of services and experiences that are difficult to synthesize.

From the 1970s onward, state organizations ranging from the Department of Health and Social Security, the Department of Education, and the Department of Labour to local authorities in regions across Britain were

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involved in debates about childcare. Yet, with no one entity responsible for provision, the state lacked a centralized system for monitoring services. In the absence of state leadership on childcare, a huge variety of voluntary and community organizations with wide-ranging agendas and interests operating at the local and national scale sought to track, lobby for, and in some instances also provide childcare. Meanwhile, and even less visibly, private childcare providers ranging from independent childminders and nannies to for-profit nurseries increasingly filled in enormous gaps.

It is difficult in this context to identify a unified vision of what kind of childcare Britons felt should exist, who they believed childcare could and should serve, and what function it was imagined to have in the national social structure. Nor is it straightforward to assess how Britons of different backgrounds experienced childcare or the lack thereof. In the face of this challenge, historians have simply tended not to consider childcare in any detail and have instead reached hasty conclusions about its history. They have argued, on the one hand, that feminists in Britain were not seriously engaged with questions of childcare until the 1980s.[8] At the same time, they have suggested that the 1980s were a period of relative insignificance in the history of childcare—that the foundations of the childcare system that existed in Britain by the 1990s were in place by the end of the 1970s.[9] These two conclusions sit uncomfortably together for historians interested in taking seriously the contributions of second-wave feminism. Stephen Brooke's careful examination of feminist childcare activism in Hackney in the early 1980s is a critical corrective.[10]

While there was certainly no unified vision for under-fives care in Britain in the 1970s or 1980s, there were nonetheless critical contributions of activism in this period, which had far-reaching consequences. Only by considering these can we make sense of the tremendous shift that took place over the 1980s. The last two decades of the twentieth century saw a new willingness to associate childcare with the reality of paid work for mothers and, more broadly, parents. This new perspective on the role of childcare in British society, to say nothing of a particular vision of what good childcare might look like, had critical consequences for the expectations and experiences of British families in the decades that followed as well as for the national childcare policies later enacted under New Labour.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, British women were urged to retreat from the workforce and fulfill their prime social function as wives

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and mothers. Supported by the psychologist John Bowlby's research on maternal–child attachment, throughout the 1950s the state and social commentators alike asserted the need for young children's continuous care by their mothers.[11] The reality that black and working-class mothers long had, and continued to work for pay, did little to temper the pronatalist current.[12] However, postwar interest in education reform, and growing attention to the isolation experienced by white middle-class housewives, drove emerging recognition in these years that both children and mothers could benefit from greater state support for under-fives.[13] While the state remained committed to the convenient view that childcare was the ultimate responsibility of mothers and their individual families, in the late 1960s the Department of Education furnished grants to support the Pre-School Playgroups Association—a voluntary organization founded by middle-class mothers in 1962 to provide part-time childcare, primarily for mothers who were not in paid work.[14] By the early 1970s, there were also voices across the political spectrum, including Margaret Thatcher's, supporting the expansion of Britain's part-time nursery school places for children aged three and four with the aim of aiding in children's early education and development.[15]

Neither of these concessions to the needs of under-fives and their parents challenged the primacy of mothers as caregivers for small children or aimed to support the growing demand for childcare that accompanied the expansion of mothers' paid work. Nursery schools that catered to the education of a significant minority of Britain's three- and four-year-olds were part-time only and ill equipped to serve the needs of working parents. In the 1960s and 1970s, the state's involvement in the provision of full-time childcare as such was limited to local council day nurseries that were viewed as an extension of social services for priority groups—single parents, mothers in ill health, disabled children, and families otherwise deemed to represent a social problem.[16] To the extent that the state did recognize that working mothers existed and needed childcare, the local and national governments alike were content to promote childminding—a private solution to the needs of individual families—which, as a home-based model of care, most often provided by women who were themselves mothers, had the advantage of resembling substitute mothering.[17]

In the 1970s, the British state's involvement in childcare provision was therefore limited to special cases. Use by working parents of what day nurseries were available was highly stigmatized through their association with

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families in need. In the mid-1970s, childminding provoked new popular anxieties and likewise acquired a stigma. While childminders were required by law to register with local authorities, in practice many minders only discovered this requirement by accident having already agreed to look after someone's child.[18] The vast majority of registered childminders were white, but informal and unregistered minding was commonplace in Britain's nonwhite communities. Moreover, among working mothers using childcare, a higher percentage of nonwhite than white mothers relied on childminding.[19] Racialized anxieties about poor-quality care rendered childminders an undesirable option in the minds of many at a time when their services were needed on an unprecedented scale.

By 1977, more than half of all official full-time childcare places for children under five in London were provided by registered childminders, and research suggested that as many as double that number of children may have been cared for by unregistered minders.[20] A study on demand for nursery provision conducted the same year revealed many more mothers wanted nursery school places than had them and that far fewer were content with childminding. Moreover, twice as many mothers wanted full-time care than had it.[21] While both the Conservative and Labour parties remained committed in principle to expanding nursery education for under-fives, in the transformed economic context of the late 1970s, even these modest plans were abandoned. The Conservative Party's spending cuts and emphasis on state rollback escalated with Thatcher's victory in 1979, and the possibility of childcare reform was discarded as a mainstream political agenda.

Despite political stagnation at the national level, by the mid-1970s, the maternalist consensus that characterized the immediate postwar years had begun to fracture.[22] Community organizations and unions, acutely aware of the reality of mothers' paid work, were increasingly advocating for more and better childcare for working mothers, often at the behest of women members. Along with progressive local government associations, they were also seeking to address the absence of provision in practice through a range of childcare initiatives.

Second-wave feminism politicized the issue of childcare within and beyond these organizations and connected it to questions of the gendered division of labor. Although a national childcare campaign did not exist in Britain until 1980, from the very outset of the women's liberation movement (WLM) in 1970, free, universal childcare was a key feminist demand.

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From 1975 onward, the newly instituted Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) also positioned itself as an advocate for childcare. In the absence of state action, activists mobilized on a local scale to establish crèches and other resources for families. That this activism has been overlooked reflects the tendency to downplay the role of mothers within second-wave feminism and motherhood as a politicizing force in activists' lives.[23]

Moreover, feminists viewed the disproportionate burden of childcare responsibilities borne by women as fundamental to women's inequality in both public and private life and viewed social provision for young children as having the ability to liberate women and remake gender relations. They understood childcare not only as a matter of children's education or basic care and not only as an issue for working mothers; they also advocated for childcare on behalf of the gender-neutral category of working parents as part of a vision for remaking whole communities. They imagined communities governed by equality and collective life—communities that would no longer be shaped by distinctions of class, race, or sex.

Between the early 1970s and the mid-1980s, there was a tremendous flourishing of projects concerned with childcare in Britain. These included everything from local organizing to establish new nurseries and protect existing ones from cuts and closures to workplace nursery campaigns, efforts to organize childcare workers and professionalize childcare, after-school programs for school-aged children, self-help organizations for working mothers seeking information on childcare options, and awareness campaigns that drew attention to women's unequal share of childcare work. Charting the history of childcare in the last third of the twentieth century requires recuperating accounts of community projects and activism from widely disparate sources to bring together a new archive.

Activists mobilized to campaign for childcare through a wide range of women's groups, including consciousness-raising groups, as well as other community organizations. Campaign leaflets and newsletters, and activists' recollections of their experiences in published memoirs and oral histories, provide a valuable source for historians. The work that activists have done in recent years to recover their own histories speaks to the urgency of capturing them. Documenting childcare activism in this period also requires looking to the charitable organizations that later emerged out of grassroots campaigns and to local government and union collections for insight into the broad range of actors involved in the quest for more and better

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childcare in Britain. The experiences of childcare workers are particularly challenging to trace archivally, yet their voices are present outside of traditional collections.

At times, considering the diversity of groups involved in childcare activism in this period can be dizzying. This chapter draws together a range of examples reflective of broader trends—from the National Child Care Campaign to Maxilla Nursery and the National Childminding Association—to illustrate how feminists and community activists of a variety of class and ethnic backgrounds shaped a new, radical vision for community-based childcare. It describes how conflicts surrounding the role of the state, of professionals, and of racial discrimination in childcare ultimately rendered this vision vulnerable as welfare budgets that supported activism came under strain in the early 1980s. Finally, it demonstrates that to survive in a shifting political-economic climate, childcare activists were increasingly compelled to organize on different, less radical terms.

Tracing the emergence of a new vision of childcare for working parents through organizing at the grassroots level allows us to consider this period in its own right. The 1970s and early 1980s were a moment of hopeful experimentation that saw childcare reform as a way to reinvent gender relations and to challenge hierarchies of race, class, and sexuality in British society. If, as the historiography has suggested, the groundwork for the fragmented market-based system of childcare that existed in Britain by the 1990s was in place by the late 1970s, its emphasis on a diversity of choices for families, on professionals, and on the needs of working parents were hardly foregone conclusions. The vision of childcare for working parents advanced by feminists and community groups in Britain in the 1970s and early 1980s was radical. It was also conflicted, never homogenous, and was riddled with tensions around race and class. Yet, it has had long, unexpected, and even hopeful legacies.

I. SHAPING A NEW VISION FOR CHILDCARE

In 1973, Pam Calder, a psychology lecturer at London South Bank Polytechnic, gave birth to her first child—Sophie. In anticipation of her return to work, Calder found a registered childminder through a list maintained by her local authority and arranged for her to care for three-month-old Sophie. On the day that she returned to work, however, the childminder she had

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hired was nowhere to be found. In desperation, Calder knocked on her next-door neighbor's door, remembering that she liked babies. Although her neighbor had never before been a childminder, she agreed to look after Sophie. This arrangement remarkably lasted, but Calder was unsatisfied—she was acutely aware that the childcare solution she had found was "not something that you can rely on as a system."[24]

Well before having children of her own, in 1970, Calder had become involved in campaigning for a workplace nursery at London South Bank. She and fellow staff members had conducted research on workplace nurseries at Nottingham, Sussex, and Middlesex universities and had worked with their union—the Association of Teachers in Technical Institutions—to research Sound Bank staff's needs and advocate for the creation of a nursery. It was only in 1975, after five years of work in that direction, and long after it would have been most useful for Calder personally, that the proposed nursery was established.

In the early 1970s, experiences like Calder's became increasingly common as greater numbers of mothers of young children returned to paid work. Confronting inadequate and expensive provision, last-minute scares when providers fell through, and, more broadly, the demands of combining paid work with primary caregiving was politicizing. In the consciousness-raising groups that emerged within the loosely organized WLM in Britain, women explored the unequal gendered division of labor in their households and in the paid workplace. They argued that the availability of high-quality childcare was fundamental to liberating women to pursue paid work and equally essential to their ability to participate in community life and in self-realization on equal terms with men. In the context of the WLM, practical campaigns to lobby local authorities for greater childcare support, to organize community nurseries, and to publicize the challenges facing working women went hand in hand with consciousness raising.

Black activists in Britain were also deeply concerned with the problem of childcare in the early 1970s. Community activists, shaped politically by black radicalism, focused on providing practical support to parents in their communities. In addition to advocating for better housing, education, employment, and an end to police mistreatment of black youth, they established women's centers that provided playgroups and a range of childcare schemes.[25] Over the course of the 1970s, white feminists and black activists, many of whom considered themselves principally community activists

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rather than feminists, increasingly aligned as they advocated for more and better childcare provision.[26]

WE REFUSE TO SIT AND WAIT

In the early 1970s, a range of activists began to criticize the model of under-fives care in Britain. Across significant differences of background and perspective, they decried the limited availability of care, the undervaluing of childcare work, and the content of early education—particularly when it came to race and sex. In dialogue with the existing childcare infrastructure, feminists and community activists began to articulate an alternative vision for childcare that represented fundamentally different notions of the relationship between caregiving and education, labor, and social values.

The most unifying critique of Britain's childcare system to emerge in the 1970s was simply its overall absence and the state's lack of commitment to reform. As the London Nursery Campaign put it in their 1977 guide to setting up community nurseries, "governmental responsibility in this field is hopelessly shirked."[27] Demands for state funding consistently brought together a diverse group of childcare activists.[28] In 1980, members of local nursery campaigns in Coventry, Leicester, Nottingham, Oxford, and Wandsworth jointly released a pamphlet that included the following lyrics, set to the tune of *Oh My Darling Clementine*:

> Give us nurseries, give us nurseries, make them free and on the state
> Expand them do not cut them, we refuse to sit and wait.
> Sack the council, sack the council, no more cuts for anyone
> We won't let them do the dirty, we demand to have our say.[29]

Free nurseries for all, provided by the state, had a catchy ring. Those, including unions, who primarily pushed for workplace and community solutions to Britain's childcare crisis emphasized that this was not at the exclusion of demanding government involvement. When the National and Local Government Officers' Association (NALGO) published a union negotiating kit for workplace nurseries in the late 1970s, they emphasized that they were "of course committed to fighting for a comprehensive state-provided service of care and education for the under-fives. That we are also campaigning for workplace nurseries in no way undercuts that commitment."[30]

To make the case for state action, a major component of campaigns for more childcare provision was challenging the pervasive view that mothers

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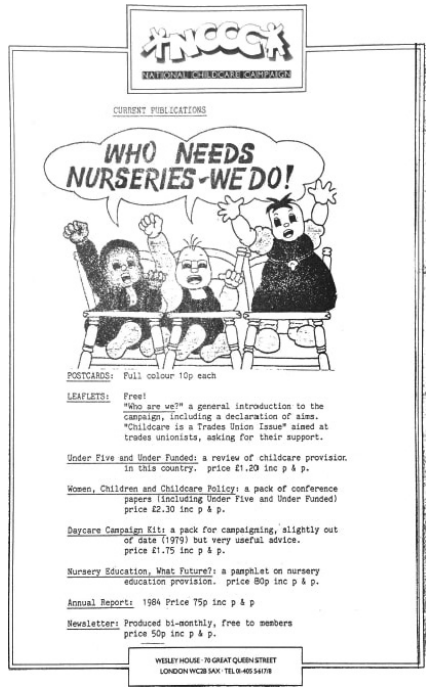
NCCC
NATIONAL CHILDCARE CAMPAIGN
CURRENT PUBLICATIONS
WHO NEEDS NURSERIES-WE DO!
POSTCARDS: Full colour 10p each
LEAFLETS: Free!
"Who are we?" a general introduction to the campaign, including a declaration of aims.
"Childcare is a Trades Union Issue" aimed at trades unionists, asking for their support.
Under Five and Under Funded: a review of childcare provision in this country. price £1.20 inc p & p.
Women, Children and Childcare Policy: a pack of conference papers (including Under Five and Under Funded) price £2.30 inc p & p.
Daycare Campaign Kit: a pack for campaigning, slightly out of date (1979) but very useful advice. price £1.75 inc p & p.
Nursery Education, What Future?: a pamphlet on nursery education provision. price 80p inc p & p.
Annual Report: 1984 Price 75p inc p & p
Newsletter: Produced bi-monthly, free to members price 50p inc p & p.
WESLEY HOUSE · 70 GREAT QUEEN STREET
LONDON WC2B 5AX · TEL 01-405 5417/8

FIGURE 1.1
Who Needs Nurseries—We Do! Courtesy of Helen Penn Personal Archive.

should be solely responsible for childcare. In 1980, the London Nursery Campaign and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education, which had been active in pushing for workplace nurseries, came together at a conference in London to form the National Child Care Campaign (NCCC; see figure 1.1). Initial steering committee members came from local campaign groups in London, Kent, Nottingham, Cheshire, Norwich, Glasgow, Brighton, and Coventry.[31] The newly formed NCCC put together a leaflet entitled "The Argument for Daycare," which sought to directly rebut what they identified as commonplace arguments against childcare provision. These included "mothers shouldn't work," "child care is a mother's/ woman's responsibility," "children will suffer if they are not cared for by their mothers," "working mothers are responsible for vandalism, delinquency and the breakup of the family," and "mothers shouldn't go out to work when so many men are unemployed."[32] The campaign was insistent that the notion that childcare was a mother's responsibility was

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the result of historical cultural norms rather than any sort of innate reality and that it was a fundamental source of women's oppression in society.[33]

For the women who campaigned for childcare in the 1970s, demanding state support and identifying childcare as a social problem that required a collective solution had transformative personal effects. Reflecting on her involvement in the WLM, the socialist feminist Lynne Segal recalled the profound discovery that "as a single mother . . . I didn't have to be solely responsible for my child . . . that this was also a social issue, you know, that there ought to be nurseries."[34] While activists focused on the negative consequences for women of the social expectation that mothers serve as sole caregivers for children, they also argued that the expectation that children be cared for exclusively within the family was bad for children themselves. As Catherine Hall remembered of her experience setting up the Women's Liberation Playgroup in Birmingham in the mid-1970s, "it was never just about giving time for work. . . . It was also about believing that it was very important for children to grow up together rather than in isolation."[35]

As was the case of women involved in the predominately white WLM, black feminists and community activists insisted that the lack of state support for childcare in Britain represented a profound abdication of social responsibility to women and families.[36] In a 1979 document penned for the National Black Women's Conference, the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent wrote powerfully that

> the lack of nursery provisions is <u>not</u> an accident, but a deliberate policy of the government and local authorities to hide the true figures of unemployment by keeping as many women out of work as possible. But as black women we have no alternative but to work if we are to maintain ourselves and our children. Many of us are unsupported mothers or heads of household, and even when there is a man, we still need to supplement his wage because it is also low. This is why we have to make whatever arrangements we can for the care of our children.[37]

While black activists, like their counterparts in the WLM, emphasized the disproportionate burden of childcare work borne by mothers, they also drew attention to racialized depictions of black mothers as bad parents and argued that this represented scapegoating for what was, in fact, a systemic failure.[38]

The absence of state support for childcare, and its gendered and racialized consequences, unified Britain's diverse childcare activists. But criticisms of Britain's childcare system in the 1970s and early 1980s did not stop

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with the absence of care; activists were also highly critical of the forms of childcare that were available to working parents. As demand for childcare in Britain dramatically surpassed supply in the 1970s, ever more parents came to rely on private and voluntary sector provision. In the absence of state care, a majority of working parents seeking an immediate solution to the childcare bind, like Calder, turned to childminders—registered or otherwise—in their communities.

Most childminders provided high-quality care for young children, but in a largely unregulated system, a high quality of care was not guaranteed.[39] Councils did very little to investigate the quality of care and facilities provided by minders, even where they were registered, and the care that minders were able to provide closely resembled the often limited resources—things like parks, playgrounds, playgroups, and toy libraries—available in their communities. A 1978 study of childminding by the London Borough of Wandsworth found that a majority of childminders in the borough were mothers between the ages of twenty-two and forty-four. They tended to mind children on a short-term basis for an average of two to six years while they were at home with their own young children, before returning to better-paid work outside of the home.[40]

The vast majority of childminders, and particularly black and Asian minders surveyed, worked more than eight hours per day to accommodate the full-time work schedules of parents.[41] They typically received no paid sickness or holiday leave. Moreover, they were low paid—earning an average of just £3 to £10 per week depending on the number of children in their care—out of which they also needed to pay for heating, food, and toys.[42] Despite this low pay, the working mothers who relied on childminders spent an average of more than a quarter of their total income on care.[43] Childminders, in short, were not trained childcare providers, nor were they valued or remunerated as such.[44] And yet they were generally pursuing the best work available to them and were generally the best option available to parents.

Childcare activists were critical of childminding as the apparent default solution to the country's childcare crisis. Both black and white activists highlighted the exploitative nature of childminding for workers and noted that for most, it was not pursued as a profession but simply as a way to make a living.[45] Activists, particularly black women, were careful to emphasize that when childminders were inadequate care providers, it was because they lacked the training and resources both material and social to deliver

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what children needed.[46] From the 1960s onward, the British media had featured sensationalized reports of poor-quality care that had associated bad childminding with women in the West Indian community in particular.[47] Albeit with very different intentions, in the WLM, activists likewise drew attention to the specter of inadequate care to promote alternatives.

Childcare activists also had concerns about the nature of the very limited state childcare care options that existed. While activists were largely united around the demand for state support for childcare, they were highly critical of what they viewed as a self-serving division between care and education represented by the state's bifurcation of under-fives services into daycare and nursery education. As Helen Penn, a leading figure in the NCCC, put it in a letter to the *Guardian* in 1980, "the distinction between social services facilities which are full-time but based on a principle of disadvantage and 'need' and educational facilities which are part-time but based on a principle of universality."[48] Activists understood this distinction as a convenient strategy of divide and rule that allowed the state to avoid responsibility for a universal system. They also challenged the intellectual distinction between caring for and educating small children. Implicit in their criticisms of state daycare and nursery education was frustration with the lack of scope for parental—and by proxy community—input and involvement.

This was particularly true when it came to the content of children's education on gender and race. From the early 1970s onward, activists pointed out the racism and sexism implicit in standard teaching materials and the inadequacy of training for both nursery and teaching staff around race, gender, and sexuality.[49] Over the course of the early 1980s, these criticisms became more widely articulated. In a 1986 article for the feminist magazine *Spare Rib*, Frankie Richford pointed out that the challenges of finding childcare were "compounded for black and minority women because of racism within childcare services and in general." In the private sector, Richford noted that children were often cared for by minders from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds who largely lacked education around race. Nor did National Nursery Examination Board (NNEB) training courses that existed to train nursery nurses employed by the state include education around race and racism.[50] As one black NNEB student put it plainly in 1985, "the NNEB is a white course."[51]

Concerns about the training of Britain's childcare providers represented one facet of activists' preoccupation with the lack of professionalization of

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childcare work. The other was shaped by novel understandings of women's unpaid work as such. Childcare activists both within and beyond the WLM saw childcare work as undervalued and childcare workers as badly exploited.[52] A 1977 study of childminders in the London Borough of Camden concluded that "the child-minder represents an extreme case of women's exploitation in our society—isolated in a subordinate and economically dependent role tied to her image as the housewife and mother."[53] As feminists formulated a new politics around women's work, they portrayed childcare workers as among the most invisible and neglected of all women workers.

Academic research on childcare availability in Britain at the time likewise highlighted the profound erasure of childcare work. In a 1978 report on the costs and organization of childcare for under-fives in Britain, the economist Peter Mottershead described a proposed scheme in the government's social services department whereby it was imagined that civil service spouses and retirees, as well as fifth and sixth formers, would be recruited to provide childcare for employees' children while parents were at work. As "family daycare workers," it was proposed that they would require next to no compensation, pursuing the work simply as a matter of enjoyment.[54] The undervaluing of what remained predominately women's work in the family continued to be readily extended to anyone providing childcare beyond it.

Activists' concerns with the exploitative nature of childcare work persisted over the course of the 1980s even as the nature of the childcare market in Britain changed. In 1985, the Greater London Council (GLC) published a guide for parents to finding and evaluating childcare for under-fives. They delineated the dizzying array of childcare options theoretically available to London parents, including increasingly common private options such as nanny shares. While they acknowledged that nannies could be a convenient solution for parents who could afford them, they were quick to point out that a nanny's job was "little different from that of a childminder, except that she is not able to work from her own home and combine childminding with her own housework and social life."[55] In addition to concerns expressed on behalf of nannies as workers, the GLC pointedly cautioned parents against the ill effects on children of "spending all day with and becoming attached to someone who is treated as a servant and has few rights and little control of her environment."[56] For the GLC, as for many of

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Britain's childcare activists, the undervaluing of childcare work was to the detriment of society as a whole.

While feminists and other community activists, academic researchers, and some local government authorities were all concerned with the experiences of childcare workers, childcare workers were also themselves organizing and becoming activists in this period. This activism overlapped—though only to a degree. Nursery workers who began to come together in action groups in the mid-1970s emphasized the need for unity across categories of workers ranging from nursery teachers to assistants to social workers who "in the past . . . may not have been sympathetic" to one another's unique problems.[57] At the same time, British unions also became increasingly engaged with the issue of under-fives care. This was particularly true of public sector unions that represented comparatively higher numbers of women workers and of unions that represented teachers and other educators—including those involved in nursery education.[58]

In the mid-1970s, the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) began an under-fives campaign, and when the NCCC launched in 1980, NUPE provided the group with an initial grant.[59] Meanwhile, the union had organized some nursery nurses employed in council day nurseries and began to turn their attention to as yet unorganized childminders. In the mid-1970s, NUPE published a childminders' charter calling for the employment of all minders by local authorities, increases in pay and conditions of service, training, and support for minders in negotiating contracts with parents.[60]

At the same time, a national organizer for the union joined together with a childminder based in Surrey in the hopes of launching a national campaign to unionize. In practice, however, childminders were largely dubious of joining a union, which many felt represented trouble, or simply an organizational model too organized and centralized to reflect the nature of their work.[61] They were nonetheless organizing on their own terms. In 1975, childminders in Camden formed an association aimed at protecting their interests. Over the next couple of years, similar groups proliferated across the country, and in 1977, hundreds of such local associations came together to launch a National Childminding Association.[62]

As childminders organized independently to represent their interests, they expressed some of the same criticisms of the existing model of care in Britain as those articulated by feminists and community childcare activists. They voiced their frustration with low pay, the lack of community

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resources and support for minders, the isolation of caring for children without contact with others, and the uncertainty and conflict around arrangements with parents. However, unlike both unions and the childcare activists of the women's movement, minders were largely not interested in being employed by local authorities.[63] They valued the autonomy and, to some degree, the informality of their work arrangements.[64] It is telling that despite the overlap in the demands of feminist childcare activists and childcare workers, activists within the WLM seem to have been relatively unaware of the organizing efforts of childminders.[65]

From the early 1970s to the mid-1980s, new criticisms of Britain's patchwork childcare system emerged in the context of the country's mounting childcare crisis. Feminist activists, black community activists, unions, and childcare workers advanced distinct criticisms of the available childcare, and the lack thereof, in Britain. Despite their varied perspectives and points of origin, in a number of key ways, their critiques overlapped. The lack of state support for childcare, the inadequacy of existing care and education in terms of quality, the content—including the racism and sexism—of education and care for under-fives, and the invisibility of childcare work as work unified activists to an increasing degree. It was at the intersection of these shared critiques that activists came together in new ways to envision alternatives.

A RADICAL VISION OF COMMUNITY-BASED CARE

There was no single key innovation in childcare provision in Britain in a period in which, as we have seen, the country's childcare landscape became ever more diverse. Yet, in these years, the critiques of activists on the British left did consolidate broadly around a vision for a new community-based system of childcare. Over the course of the 1970s and early 1980s, a growing number of activists made the case for collective, socialized, full-time childcare that offered a genuine alternative to existing options for working parents. While feminists in particular looked back in time to Britain's wartime nurseries as a model of what was possible with state support, they envisioned a fundamentally new kind of care for young children that was more deeply rooted in and shaped by the unmet needs of Britain's diverse communities. They imagined that community childcare, supported financially by the state but ultimately independent of it, would offer education and care together in an integrated model that served entire families and

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communities. These communities would include not only children and their parents but also childcare workers, who they imagined could have a new kind of relationship to parents, to their workplaces, and to the children they looked after.

Unions, community activists, and feminists saw a comprehensive system of community-based childcare as a critical way of addressing the unmet childcare needs of working mothers. This involved making a strong claim, still at odds with the mainstream consensus, that women needed to work for pay, had long done so, and often also wanted to do so. Activists pointed to Europe to indicate the comparative inadequacy of childcare provision in the United Kingdom and to the United States to highlight the existence of a more widespread social acceptance of the validity of mothers' paid work. If the aims of childcare activists began with securing basic support to meet the day-to-day needs of working mothers, they did not stop there. Feminists argued that adequate childcare would liberate women to participate in all aspects of life on equal terms with men. They also rejected the notion that childcare was only a problem for working mothers and insisted that it served the needs and interests of all working parents. For black women activists involved in campaigning for and organizing childcare in these years, the aim was likewise to support parents in their communities as well as to address the specific challenges facing working mothers.[66]

In positing the need for childcare to serve not only working mothers but also, more broadly, working parents, feminist childcare activists advanced a radical gender politics. Activists began to organize collective childcare arrangements in their communities on an ad hoc basis from the early 1970s, and these activists included men as well as women. In the Birmingham Women's Liberation Playgroup, mothers and fathers alike rotated responsibility for caring for of a group of young children several mornings per week.[67] In the context of the WLM, participating in childcare at movement conferences and in communities became a way for men to express solidarity with feminist aims and to advance the argument that childcare was not solely women's responsibility.[68]

The leaflets and fliers that activists generated as part of childcare campaigns throughout the 1970s often referenced the needs of working mothers and working parents interchangeably. In some cases they also explicitly highlighted the radical potential of a new childcare system to deliver on gender equality in the present and on a more equal future for young

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children. The London Nursery Campaign's "Do-It-Yourself Nursery" guide characteristically included a cartoon drawing of two children playing in a toy house. The little boy featured, carrying a broom, announces to the girl that "This is the second time I've cleaned the floor today." Below the cartoon, a caption written in the girl's voice notes "Ok, we're in the Wendy house but he's a househusband and I'm the breadwinner and we're playing at being the Anti-Nazi League Committee."[69] For feminist activists, the aim of a new system of community-based childcare was an education for all that was deeply intertwined with the politics of women's liberation and gender equality.

Despite tremendous challenges in securing financial support to make new nurseries possible, community nurseries and organizations that supported them proliferated from the mid-1970s. These new nurseries often emerged out of less formal collective childcare arrangements, such as neighborhood playgroups, or out of local housing associations or women's groups. Academic research on community childcare initiatives conducted in 1978 suggested that it took an average of at least two years to set up a new nursery. Community nurseries were, as activists themselves pointed out, a testament to perseverance and community-minded activism. As Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe reflected on black women's experiences with childcare activism, "we have succeeded in setting up nurseries for our children which would never have existed without our determination."[70] Despite their tenuous beginnings, community nurseries and the campaigns that supported them proved an enduring model for childcare reform in Britain.

MAXILLA: A MODEL COMMUNITY NURSERY

This was especially true of one nursery. The model of integrated, community-based childcare and family services pioneered by the Maxilla nursery located in what was then the impoverished and diverse area of North Kensington, London exemplified the new vision for community-based childcare emerging on the left.[71] The diversity of community childcare provision, and the ad hoc nature of most of Britain's community nurseries, makes it difficult to offer a sweeping synthesis of the kinds of childcare provision that characterized the voluntary sector in these years.

Nonetheless, Maxilla was, in many ways, representative of the aims of activists involved in community childcare projects across Britain: to create

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childcare centers that combined the functions of education and care, to unify staff with different kinds of backgrounds and training, to provide hours and schedules that would support working parents, and to provide full-time care for children under two as well as children aged three and four.[72] Maxilla was also typical in its efforts to integrate staff and parents in long range planning and policy making. Where Maxilla proved more unique was in the extent to which it was able to fulfill these aims.

The Maxilla nursery first opened in April 1978 under the arches of the Westway Motorway, where it remained for the next forty years. Its opening was the result of nearly ten years of diverse local activism for a new model of early education, childcare, and community services. From the late 1960s onward, a local voluntary group called the People's Association, with its origins in the heterogeneous New Left, began running neighborhood advice centers and campaigning to improve conditions in the community. Their concerns ranged from housing and education to illegal childminding.

Dissatisfied with inadequate state daycare provision and the lack of affordable private childcare options, and inspired by the possibilities of community involvement in childcare, the association began to set up playgroups and neighborhood play spaces.[73] They intentionally sought out local parents who were struggling, including those relying on illegal childminders or simply leaving children unattended while they worked. Naomi Honigsbaum, one of the subsequent founders of Maxilla, recalled that activists—a number of whom were not from the immediate community—deliberately worked to cultivate good relationships with local women across their differences. Overtime, these connections strengthened, and growing numbers of community parents brought their children to playgroups.[74]

North Kensington's activists, who became increasingly engaged with the women's movement, recognized that part-time playgroups alone could not solve the problems of working parents.[75] In 1971, the People's Association secured a charitable grant that enabled them to hire Judy Wilcox, a qualified teacher and local resident, as a community worker to further investigate the needs of local families.[76] Meanwhile, while the People's Association was increasingly concerned with the issue of childcare, local campaigners in North Kensington had lost a battle to prevent the construction of the Westway Motorway overpass through the middle of the community. Despite this setback, and as a result of their activism and negotiations with the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, twenty-three acres of space under

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the new concrete motorway had been held in trust for community benefit when it was erected in 1970.

In 1973, Wilcox formed the voluntary Westway Nursery Association—a group of professionals, local campaigners, and parents determined to start a center in the community space under the motorway that would provide care and education to under-fives and support for local parents.[77] The association pursued further research into the precise kind of services that would best support the community. Its research made crystal clear what activists already knew in principle—that many local mothers worked for pay out of need and in some cases also desire.[78] Even if they could secure a place in a council day nursery, the 9 to 5 hours offered by such facilities simply were not adequate to accommodate their schedules.[79] Whether or not they worked for pay, local mothers were also isolated and lacked social contact and wanted more childcare.[80]

As the Westway Nursery Association continued to reflect on plans for the nursery center, it set about the political, logistical, and financial work needed to see Maxilla built. Although the local council was unwilling to provide the childcare services that were badly needed by local residents, it was nonetheless willing to accept, and indeed encourage, community initiatives to address these needs. The Westway Nursery Association soon secured its support in principle for the project.[81] Between 1973 and 1975, it managed to attract financial backing from several organizations. This was no small feat as the building costs alone for the architecturally innovative center amounted to £280,000.[82]

The Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) agreed to pay for the costs of the proposed nursery school as well as professional fees for a parents' center. The Urban Aid Programme—75 percent of which was financed by the central government and 25 percent by the local authority—would cover the costs of the day nursery. A charitable grant of £50,000 from the Vanessa Lowndes Charitable Trust paid the capital costs of the parents' center.[83] When the center was finally complete and opened to local families in 1978, Wilcox reflected simply that "establishing the centre has been a bureaucratic nightmare."[84] In very concrete terms, the lack of an integrated national system of childcare in Britain made community efforts to orchestrate such care onerously difficult.

Upon completion, the Maxilla nursery center (figure 1.2) comprised a nursery school for children aged three to five managed by a head teacher

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FIGURE 1.2
Maxilla Nursery. Courtesy of Maxilla Nursery Archive.

and the ILEA, an under-three daycare center managed by the Westway Nursery Association, a parent center with a kitchen and laundry, and a large outdoor play area and garden.[85] The building was primarily single story, with the two-story parents' center as the core from which the nursery school, daycare, kitchen, and laundry radiated outward.[86] Lunch for the children was provided through the ILEA's meals service, and in-house cooks prepared breakfast and snacks in the center's kitchen. The nursery school was open during normal school hours and terms, but the center remained opened year-round from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and provided extended and holiday care for the portion of the nursery school children whose parents required it.[87] All of Maxilla's services were free to families.

By the summer of 1978, Maxilla was caring for fifty-two children in its nursery school and thirty-six under-threes in its daycare center. The center accepted children exclusively from a small catchment area that included three local tower blocks, one low rise, and a just a handful of streets. A majority of the families served by the center lived in council housing. Wilcox described the tiny catchment area as "a political decision. We're saying that everyone has the right to a nursery education."[88] The children who

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attended Maxilla came from more than a dozen ethnic backgrounds.[89] Staff and families alike saw its racial and cultural diversity as serving to break down barriers in the community. Sarah Harrison, whose daughter attended Maxilla in the late 1980s, remembered—even after what was a period of significant change in the nursery in the mid-1980s—that it served as a "great equalizer" and a way of imbedding families into the community.[90]

From the time of its opening in 1978, Maxilla represented a truly innovative model based on the feminist left's novel understanding of the needs of children and working parents alike. The center promoted a child-centered approach to learning through play and prioritized what they described as nonsexist and nonracist approaches to childcare.[91] By design, the daycare and nursery school shared access to the center's outdoor space, which encouraged mingling among both staff and children, and overlap between the center's care and educational aims. Maxilla also facilitated an intentionally parent-centered model of care. The drop-in center included space for making tea, snacks, and informal conversation as well a regular program of adult education courses on a range of subjects. This was seen as fundamental to the center's vision for a community space that would support families holistically and provide parents—both mothers and fathers—with a break from caregiving responsibilities.

Maxilla also represented an innovative model of staffing and management in keeping with the antihierarchical ethos of the women's movement and of community organizing. Its management committees included representatives from staff and parents as well as the statutory authorities and local voluntary bodies involved in funding the center. When Maxilla published an official one-page list of aims in 1984, the nursery indicated that it had taken the management committee and staff nearly two years to formulate—a testament to the high value placed on collaborative decision-making.[92] From the outset, the Westway Nursery Association had understood childcare workers as a key part of the local community as well as the nursery. Nursery staff worked in shifts from either 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. or 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. to ensure both reasonable working hours for staff, and a long enough day to support local working parents. By 1980, the Association had also persuaded ILEA to trial the unconventional shift pattern for its nursery school staff.[93] Much as parents expressed a sense of community integration through Maxilla, staff appear to have found working at the unique nursery inspiring. Suzan Rowan, a former nursery officer recalls

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feeling free to explore her creativity with the children, and being encouraged to participate fully in meetings on the center's curriculum and ethos.[94]

From the mid-1970s onward, Maxilla became a touchstone in the minds of childcare activists for what an integrated model of community-based childcare in Britain could look like, and the center was frequently visited and studied. It was not long, however, before changes in the nursery's funding began to erode its vision. In 1986, under Thatcher's conservative government, both the ILEA and the GLC were abolished. Management of Maxilla was handed over to the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Shortly thereafter, the council moved to a new funding model whereby they awarded contracts rather than grants to community organizations. From the perspective of Maxilla's management, the rise of contract culture left community groups in competition with one another as well as with council services. They felt, increasingly, as though the borough rather than the local community set the agenda for the nursery.[95] In reflecting back on the long history of Maxilla, parents and staff expressed a profound sense of nostalgia for the culture of the center in the 1980s before these changes.

In the 1990s, the council's finances deteriorated, and funding for Maxilla was cut. To secure central government social services funding to support their operating costs, the nursery needed to include children from outside of its original catchment area. Meanwhile, the nursery school reverted to a conventional school day and term-time only contracts. These changes significantly affected the nursery's services and ethos. In 1998, Gordon Brown's Labour government announced plans to launch Sure Start centers, which would provide integrated services for under-threes and their families, run by local authorities. While these centers were not as highly integrated with schooling as was the case with Maxilla, they were imagined very much in Maxilla's model. Ironically, local councils, including Kensington and Chelsea, moved to shut down existing council-funded nurseries, including Maxilla, all the while working to secure central government funding for new facilities.[96]

While Maxilla survived its attempted closure in 2003, in 2004, in a ludicrous twist of fate, it was redesignated as a Sure Start center. Despite these setbacks and the erosion of aspects of Maxilla's original vision, at the turn of the twenty-first century, nearly thirty years after its founding, Maxilla remained a powerful model. In a 2003 piece for the *Guardian*, Polly Toynbee concluded that "Britain's real future is in Maxilla, not Oxford."[97] From its

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earliest days, Maxilla had aimed to support working parents, to demonstrate the validity of collective childcare, to bring together communities, and to "be an example of how services for children under 5 can be integrated and organised."[98] To this end, Maxilla's story was one of tremendous success.

II. POINTS OF FRACTURE

Maxilla was representative of the vision at the heart of the community childcare activism that flourished in Britain in the 1970s and early 1980s, and yet there is no question that its enduring success was unique. While many local groups managed for a time to provide a new model of integrated childcare in local communities, few found or could establish permanent physical homes or could so effectively weather episodes of financial upheaval.[99] Maxilla was also uncommonly successful in another respect. To a large degree, the feminists and other left activists who campaigned for the nursery, not all of whom were themselves integrated into the local community, were able to forge connections with a highly diverse group of local residents to collaborate on the project.[100] While this process was not always straightforward, in most other instances, it simply didn't happen. In reflecting back on her involvement in the Birmingham Women's Liberation Playgroup in the mid-1970s, Catherine Hall remembers that the almost exclusively white middle-class feminists who organized the playgroup had hoped to involve local Pakistani and Bangladeshi women from the area around Balsall Heath Park, yet they did not have much success in doing so.[101]

It was foremost around race and ethnicity that community-based childcare activism ran into its own limits. As Natalie Thomlinson has pointed out, race was not discussed at the first WLM conference at Ruskin College, Oxford in 1970 and remained a blind spot for the women's movement.[102] Nonetheless, by 1980, questions of race had made their way to the center of feminist childcare organizing. There is no doubt that the white feminist activists who dominated organizations such as the NCCC were concerned about the issue of racial as well as sex discrimination; however, analyses of gender inequality dominated their agenda. In their late 1970s booklet on establishing community nurseries, the London Nursery Campaign emphasized racial and cultural awareness as a key part of sensitivity to a child's needs. It advised nurseries to develop a picture of the whole child within

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their respective family and to use toys and books that represented children from a variety of backgrounds and traditions. It indicated with frustration the example of one council nursery "with an African cook and a number of African children" that "was only allowed to serve traditional English food—it didn't occur to anyone to suggest otherwise."[103]

From the formation of the NCCC in 1980, activists made antiracism a key feature of their vision for remaking both childcare and childcare work. The organization recognized that racism was not only something that existed in society at large but also a force that needed to be confronted within the campaign itself. Helen Penn, a founding member of the NCCC, recalls "lacerating debates about anti-racism" and antiracism trainings that involved "admitting and facing up to our own racism."[104] In 1982, the NCCC set up a black working party (BWP) as a subgroup under the broader umbrella of the campaign organization. The BWP aimed "to offer advice, resources and information and opportunities for black parents and workers to make their views known to the influential powers that control children's education and social development."[105] To this end, the group secured funding from the Commission for Racial Equality to hire a black worker.

While the BWP pursued its aims to understand and support the childcare needs of black parents, and to ensure that antiracism permeated the national campaign's work, its role and influence within the broader organization became a point of tension. In early 1985, members of the BWP expressed their frustration with serving as an advisory group within the NCCC and their desire to be a fully autonomous unit. They argued, moreover, that "the NCCC is a white organization and doesn't appear to think about how other people raise children differently." The black worker, Ann Clark, who had been hired by the BWP also vocalized her own experiences of isolation as the only employee of color in the office.[106]

In a 1986 meeting of the NCCC's management council, the campaign asserted its commitment to promoting antiracism, but the discussion revealed that members of the BWP continued to feel isolated from, and unable to influence, the direction of the campaign's work. The BWP also suggested that some members of the campaign lacked a commitment to antiracism as a priority.[107] The NCCC's executive committee minutes faithfully reported these criticisms and appeared determined to confront them head on. Nevertheless, the tensions surrounding the role of antiracism

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in childcare campaigning, and the status of racism within the NCCC, persisted.[108]

To some extent, the shared goal of campaigning for more and better childcare had brought the interests of black and white activists together over the course of the 1970s and early 1980s, and yet, as Helen Penn remembers, "steering committee meetings were often very unhappy affairs, with bitter accusations of bullying, racism, incompetence and betrayal. Our sisterhood was very unsisterly."[109] The intensely fought battles around race and racism within the NCCC had the potential to tear the organization apart.

The limits of childcare campaigning to unify the varied agendas of activists in practice were mirrored by other tensions that existed from the very outset within the vision of community-based childcare. These theoretical tensions ultimately made campaigners vulnerable to ideological fracture and their agendas susceptible to political exploitation. If these tensions were apparent from the mid-1970s, their consequences weren't always immediately evident. The wide umbrella of the NCCC drew together activists from across Britain with politics ranging from moderately liberal to socialist sectarian and feminist anarchist. Their intellectual differences manifested clearly in conflicts over the organization's internal management; the anarchists, for instance, wanted the constitution to guarantee that the campaign would function ultracollectively in all decision-making.[110] These debates made the routine work of running a campaign challenging and intensely political, but on a more fundamental level they reflected broader fractures in members' attitudes toward governance and the state.

As we have seen, Britain's childcare activists widely believed that the state should fund provision for under-fives. However, they also advanced a powerful community-driven vision of childcare that suggested that a single, uniform state-funded system would not be right for all families—including for reasons of racial and cultural diversity. As Pam Calder summarized, "we used to say state funding but not state control."[111] Within the NCCC, activists fought over whether to advocate for workplace nurseries supported by employers, before campaigners for workplace nurseries split off into a separate organization.[112] At times, campaigning for employer childcare support, community initiatives, or private funding was presented as a necessary workaround given the reality of inadequate state provision, and yet it was both tied to and propagated a wider acceptance that the state ultimately would not and could not deliver on a universal system. That

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unions such as NALGO felt the need to clarify that their campaign for workplace nurseries was not in conflict with their demand for a comprehensive state service reflects the fine line that activists walked. While advocating for universal state support in theory, activists built a movement for community and workplace solutions in practice. In the process, they helped to propagate a model of diverse provision and parental choice.

Another point of division among activists in the childcare campaigns of the 1970s and early 1980s was the matter of professionalization. Activists were broadly committed to the professionalization of childcare work as a solution to the undervaluing of women's work as such and to concerns about the quality of the existing public and private childcare provision in Britain. In addition to raising theoretical objections to the lack of professionalization, they also actively set out to professionalize childcare work in keeping with their ideals. From the late 1970s onward, for instance, activists criticized the state's NNEB training courses for nursery nurses for their racism and attitudes toward child development, and by the early 1980s, they had created what they considered to be corrective short-courses of their own.[113]

Yet despite their push for professionalization, from the outset childcare activists expressed ambivalence about the professionalization of childcare—sometimes casting suspicion on the very notion of being a childcare professional at all. Members of the London Nursery Campaign noted that "there is often a gap between what 'professionals' see as suitable for young children, and what parents expect. This is highlighted with minority groups such as West Indians or West Africans, who have different traditions of childrearing."[114] As was the case when it came to the state, parent activists wanted to secure a role for themselves in shaping the childcare provided in their communities.

For other activists, the major issue with professionalization was cost and the reality that appropriately valuing childcare work as work potentially put the needs of working parents and of childcare workers into conflict. Reflecting back on activism for childcare in these years, Lucy Daniels, the founder of the Working Mothers Association, recalled "we wanted childcare to be of good quality and professionalized, but equally we knew that the more professionalized it became, quite rightly, it would become more expensive . . . is it then excluding people from either being a childcare worker and having a decent wage or mothers going out to work?"[115] In

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some cases, childcare workers—particularly childminders—were themselves skeptical of the potential benefits of professionalization when it came to the conditions of their labor. These tensions over the role of professionals in childcare reflected broader frictions regarding who should have authority over children.

There were also tensions surrounding the ultimate object of childcare activism. For feminists, as we have seen, there was no necessary conflict between the interests of children, mothers, and parents when it came to childcare.[116] In a 1985 statement paper characteristic of WLM's advocacy, the NCCC began with the needs of women, noting "first and foremost, we view women's position in Britain (and other societies) as one of inequality and oppression." They went on to describe the disproportionate burden of childcare on mothers before concluding "a wider sharing of childcare—between mothers and fathers and between parents and services—would offer children the possibility of relating with a wide range of adults and children."[117] While childcare was understood as being to the advantage of all, in practice feminist activists tended to emphasize the role of childcare in supporting working mothers and working parents. At times this emphasis alienated women involved in childcare campaigning who were not employed for pay.

In their June 1981 campaign newsletter, the NCCC reported on a meeting of the campaign's North East Regional Group held in March. According to the NCCC, "the non-working mothers were particularly worried at the emphasis put by the campaign on the needs of working parents. They asked why the emphasis was not on the needs of children. The reply was that the NCCC believed that good childcare was good for both parents and children and it wanted to see greater choice for all parents in determining their own childrearing arrangements without being confined by the stereotype 'happy family.'"[118] However subtle, these questions of emphasis proved highly charged as activists sought to build a broad coalition in support of universal provision.

Whether campaigners represented childcare as primarily serving the interests of mothers, parents, or children was often a strategic choice driven by audience as much as it was a political one. During the 1980s, activists, who found themselves increasingly on the defensive, were more and more inclined to emphasize that childcare was in the interests of children and of parents rather than to women specifically—sometimes rewriting history

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in the process. In 1996, the Trades Union Congress (TUC)—which had from the mid-1970s advocated for childcare on behalf of working mothers and parents—wrote "our starting point has always been 'what's best for children.'" They went on to say that "children need the best start in life that society can offer them," before noting "working parents need support too."[119] As the distinct experiences of working mothers gave way in childcare activism to a focus on the needs of parents and children, feminism's cohesive critique of social expectations around childcare and its demand for liberation gave way to a more pragmatic appeal to the apparently apolitical interests of children themselves.

To a degree, activists were also conflicted about even the most fundamental demand—that men participate in childcare on equal terms with women. The overwhelming thrust of 1970s and early 1980s childcare activism indicated that men assume a far greater share of responsibility, and yet activists at times expressed anxieties about men's participation in childcare whether as parents to their own children or as childcare workers. In their 1985 guide to childcare for working parents, the GLC argued "it is vitally important for under fives to see men in caring roles and women in positions of authority" and that therefore "good childcare practice should include the employment of men in the care of under fives." Nonetheless, they cautioned that "it can be argued that, in a society in which men have been conditioned to behave in an aggressive and egocentric way, and to respond sexually to children, entrusting them to a male carer is running a real risk of exposing them to abuse."[120]

Even where concerns about men's role as caregivers were less extreme, activists did occasionally express concern about men filling these toles. Reflecting on her experience as a mother in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Cynthia Cockburn suspects that she didn't demand that her husband share childcare responsibilities with her equally out of concern for her custody rights were they to separate.[121] Women activists' fears about a truly equal division of childcare labor were perhaps unsurprising in a world in which women continued to attain social status to a great degree through motherhood.

There is no question that the 1970s and early 1980s saw a new unity flourish among a diverse group of activists invested in seeing Britain develop a universal system of free under-fives care, funded by the state. Nonetheless, there were limits to the effectiveness of community-based childcare

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activism as activists failed to transcend divisions of race and class to build a truly unified campaign. There were also fundamental tensions of vision within childcare activism regarding the state's role, the professionalization of childcare work, and the involvement of parents and communities. These tensions only became more evident and problematic in the years that followed. It was less the case that left politics fractured in the mid-1980s than that it had never fully cohered despite the existence of what Helen Penn remembers as the "common unambiguous goal" of childcare provision.[122]

III. SURVIVING THE 1980S

During the 1980s, there was a growing public, government, and employer willingness to accept the reality of mothers' paid work. This brought with it an acceptance—albeit often a grudging one—of the need for more childcare options for families, but this acceptance did not readily translate into the sort of action that Britain's community childcare activists had long advocated. The national government, local authorities, and public and private sector employers alike were largely content to wait for someone else to provide a solution to the mounting childcare crisis. Nonetheless, as we have seen, in the early 1980s there were efforts on the part of some statutory bodies and local government authorities working in conjunction with the growing voluntary and private childcare sectors to support working parents in new ways.

Most notable among these was the GLC, which from 1981 funded a huge range of local childcare projects in London. Between 1981 and 1985, the GLC's Women's Committee provided financial backing to more than 220 childcare initiatives ranging from community nurseries and day nurseries to children's centers, extended playgroups, after-school projects, toy libraries, and childminder groups.[123] This support created 3,000 new childcare places in London, but perhaps even more significantly, it provided the institutional framework within which the childcare activism of organizations like the NCCC could flourish. While the financial support of the GLC for childcare projects was confined to metropolitan London, it was a sufficient boon to the NCCC that they could focus their voluntary efforts on national work.

As it turned out, the conditions that supported the dramatic expansion of grassroots childcare activism that took place in Britain in the early 1980s

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under the auspices of the GLC were short lived. In 1985, Thatcher's government, politically threatened by leftist London, passed the Local Government Act that returned the GLC's previously consolidated functions to individual London boroughs. By March 1986 when the GLC was officially abolished, the funding that had supported a great deal of London, and indeed the country's left, feminist childcare activism, dried up. The abolition of the GLC profoundly altered the course of childcare campaigning and community childcare provision in Britain. As we have seen, it was a serious blow to Maxilla and an episode that proved difficult for the nursery to recover from.

What followed in the second half of the 1980s was the decline of radical community childcare activism and the further marketization of the childcare system in Britain. This marketization came to full fruition in the largely employer-funded public–private partnerships that emerged beginning in 1990, which in turn set the stage for New Labour's family policy—something we will return to in chapter 4. But from the mid-1980s, the central government began to play a greater role in helping British parents to access childcare. It did so not by providing universal public services as activists had hoped but rather by subsidizing existing private and voluntary provision on new, far less radical political terms. Initially, this support came in large part through organizational grants and partnerships and later through direct grants to families in the form of childcare vouchers.[124]

In this shifting context, and to accommodate the changing funding landscape, activists began to regroup organizationally and to pare down aspects of their initial vision for remaking childcare. In the process, the conflicts and tensions that had always existed within the left's childcare activism came to the fore. The increasingly marketized childcare system that was emerging in Britain, supported by the government, promoted the proliferation of varied options for families rather than a single model of provision and tended to reinforce a view that different families wanted and needed different sorts of childcare. It also tended to see the interests and needs of childcare workers as distinct from those of families rather than viewing both providers and recipients of care as members of the same communities. Finally, childcare was justified in the name of parents and of children—not, primarily, as a means of achieving women's equality in work or society.

As activists and the organizations that they founded adapted to survive in the new world of the late 1980s, the costs to their vision were high.

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Activists accommodated themselves increasingly to an emphasis on the needs of the gender-neutral category of working parents and the seemingly apolitical category of children rather than advocating explicitly for women's liberation. They also focused less and less on questions of racial inequality in childcare provision, at a moment when growing numbers of minority and low-income families struggled to access affordable childcare.[125] Meanwhile, childcare campaigners continued to promote the professionalization of childcare work, despite some ambivalence, and engaged even less with the experiences of childcare workers themselves. These shifts in orientation not only precluded ongoing demands for universal, state-funded childcare for all Britons, but in the long term it rendered less visible the experiences of black and low-income families and of childcare workers.

THE DAYCARE TRUST: FROM POLITICAL CAMPAIGN TO CHARITY

Beginning in 1985, the NCCC began to worry over its financial future. The campaign had long relied on a diverse patchwork of funding to support their work, but from 1981, income from the GLC had been particularly critical to its stability in a constantly shifting funding landscape.[126] By 1983, the campaign had hired three London workers, all funded by the GLC.[127] But already in March 1985, the campaign began to plan for a future without this critical support.[128] With the abolition of the GLC, the NCCC faced an uncertain financial future. In the short term, the campaign hoped to rely on funding from the London Borough Grants Scheme set up to manage transitional support for organizations that had previously been funded by the GLC; however, it was quick to acknowledge that its funding difficulties would not end there.[129] As the executive committee put it in its 1986 annual report, "1986 has not been an easy year for the NCCC. . . . At least we have survived."[130]

For the NCCC, the problem of funding was closely linked to ongoing discussions about the direction of its work. By 1986, as well as being an umbrella campaign organization, facilitating contact between local groups, and pushing for universal childcare, the NCCC had also developed expertise as a childcare research body offering resources and support to a range of individuals and organizations. In the face of change in funding structure, a report on campaign work raised the concern that "the campaign has been operating without a sense of direction. While the overall aims were being fulfilled, ie, building a mass campaign for free and democratic childcare

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provided by the state, workers felt that there were increasing demands for the NCCC to develop policy stance, research and development and publications on issues surrounding childcare."[131]

Over time, the sources of the campaign's funding had come to dictate the direction of its work. A growing sense of uncertainty regarding the campaign's direction was compounded by long-standing conflict regarding the priority, or lack thereof, placed on the issue of racial discrimination. In reflecting on the challenges ahead, in 1986 the executive committee was overwhelmed by the magnitude of work confronting it on a day-to-day basis and noted that "we have wanted to give particular attention to developing anti-racist strategies for the campaign." The unstated addendum was that this was continuing to prove difficult.[132]

In the face of interrelated financial and organizational challenges, the NCCC looked to the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS), which had previously funded a small-scale community nursery project run by members of the campaign. Now the NCCC hoped for far more substantial organizational support for its work. To be eligible for statutory funding, however, the NCCC needed to reconstitute as a charity that did not have an expressly political aim. To accomplish this without abandoning the campaigning mission at its heart, the NCCC decided to bifurcate into two arms—the political NCCC and a new charity called the Daycare Trust (DCT). At the DHSS's instigation, the NCCC worked to define how the campaign wing and the DCT would operate separately to limit overtly political campaigning to the NCCC arm. This would include separate activities and bank accounts as well as clear rules about the use of information.[133] In addition to resolving the funding crisis left in the wake of the GLC's abolition, the decision to split the NCCC into two seemed to offer a solution to the organization's conflicting focal points and internal agendas. By parceling voluntary work and campaign activism into the NCCC, and research, advisory work, and consulting into the new DCT, the organization defined a new path.

The decision to form the DCT and secure new funding was fundamental to the NCCC's survival as a campaign body. Nevertheless, it came at a significant cost. Most immediately, this meant splitting the concerns of black and working-class women off into the NCCC. In 1990, the NCCC and DCT executive council outlined the priorities of the two organizations. The NCCC would "strength, remain authentic" and "honour commitments to

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working class and black and ethnic minority women." Meanwhile, they hoped that the DCT would "be recognized as experts with our own particular stance, to be financially secure" and carry through on "ongoing work and developing projects."[134]

Albeit inadvertently, the creation of the DCT facilitated the relegation of the concerns of black and working-class women increasingly to the realm of voluntary activism at a moment when the NCCC's expertise in childcare consulting became increasingly influential in shaping government and employer policy. Over time, the NCCC's split resulted in what were, in practice, two organizations with distinct visions. By 1991, even while the DCT was committed to advocating for "a substantial increase in services for young children," it also emphasized the values of "choice and diversity" in childcare provision.[135] If childcare activists had long valued parental involvement in shaping childcare, an emphasis on diversity of provision and choices for families was nonetheless very different from demands for free, universal childcare shaped by community involvement.

In 1996, Helen Penn contributed a powerful essay entitled "A Dream for the Future" to an anniversary newsletter marking ten years since the formation of the DCT.[136] Penn pointed out that since the initial formation of the NCCC in 1980, there had been profound changes in the way that women were perceived in Britain but very little change in under-fives services. In Penn's mind, "some of the innovative ideas of the 1970s and 1980s have sunk almost without a trace." She worried that the united struggle for under-fives care had again fractured into demands for nursery education on the one hand and daycare to support working women on the other, and she went on to remind readers of the feminist aim of publicly funded community nurseries that combined care for and education of young children. She also worried that feminist demands for the professionalization of childcare work had gone too far and were now simply feeding into a system of overregulation that did little to ensure the highest quality of care for the most families.

Penn also felt that while activists had won the argument for women's work, they had lost the argument for collective childcare. In her mind, within the DCT, concern about local communities and nonhierarchical provision had all but disappeared. As she concluded, her frustration was palpable: "If the Daycare Trust wants a theme for the next ten years, then revive this idea about what a good collective nursery might look like. Forget the

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Children Act, forget vouchers, forget Ofsted, and concentrate on dreams!" While Penn's analysis in many ways held, she did not acknowledge that the DCT had managed to fashion itself into an organization that was able, by 1996, to work with government in the pursuit of national childcare reform on an unprecedented scale.

A NEW KIND OF ORGANIZING: THE WORKING MOTHERS ASSOCIATION

Increasingly in the mid-1980s, it was organizations like the DCT rather than grassroots campaigns like the NCCC before it that dominated advocacy for childcare provision in Britain. The Working Mothers Association (WMA), first founded as a local group in Clapham, London in 1980 and consolidated as a national organization in 1985, was characteristic of a fundamentally new kind of organizing that took shape in the middle of the decade. Like the NCCC, the WMA came about in the contexts of women's struggles to find childcare—initially as a self-help and mutual support organization for working mothers. But unlike the NCCC, despite its frustrations with government policy, the WMA never looked to the state to deliver universal childcare for all Britons. It was oriented from the very outset toward employers as potential investors in childcare.

The WMA looked to the government for tax relief for families' childcare costs, targeted support for low-income and single parents, credentialing and regulation, and the sorts of partnerships with the private and voluntary sector that were already developing in practice. In this sense, like the new DCT, the WMA relegated the concerns of the most marginalized low-income and minority families to the realm of the state, while looking elsewhere for more immediate solutions to the problems confronting predominately white middle-class families. Although the WMA remained interested in the perspective of childcare workers, in practice it referenced these largely to advocate for professionalization in the form of more training and higher standards of care.[137]

The group intentionally defined itself as representing a different approach from the kinds of campaign organizations that had been funded by grants from unions, the ILEA, and the GLC in the early 1980s. Lucy Daniels recalls that "at the time there was still quite a lot of fear and suspicion within the establishment around 'leftie bra-burning feminists' as they were sometimes unfairly regarded. Our approach was to smooth rather than ruffle feathers."[138] This strategy had a profound practical appeal—in the absence of

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state action on childcare, the private sector and its representative organizations like the Confederation for British Industry remained an untapped source of potential funding. Daniels drew on her background in marketing to appeal to employers for support—highlighting examples of best practice when it came to supporting working mothers in their search for childcare rather than castigating organizations for failing to do enough.[139] By appealing to private organizations for funding—ranging from charitable giving to more targeted grants for research that might benefit personnel divisions in their efforts to work with employees—the WMA built new alliances. In the process the organization also homed in on one of the activities pursued by the NCCC: gathering information about existing provision and options for parents and organizations alike in what was an increasingly diverse, decentralized system.

The WMA proved highly effective in building bridges with business and, to an extent, the political establishment. Whereas grassroots campaign organizations like the NCCC had positioned themselves in opposition to party politics, in the late 1980s the WMA reached out to both Conservative and Labour Members of Parliament (PMs)—often specifically appealing to the wives of what was still an overwhelmingly male British political leadership.[140] As other organizations like the newly formed DCT, and, as we will see, flexible work organizations, looked increasingly toward private sector funding in this period, a new coalition of moderate reform-minded childcare advocates began to emerge. In the process, the vision of a state-financed universal childcare system advanced by feminists and community activists beginning in the early 1970s fed into a new, market-oriented politics. It is no coincidence that by 1990, the WMA considered changing its name to Parents at Work. Advocating for childcare on behalf of working parents and children had become a more politically salient strategy, and indeed one more likely to deliver quickly on childcare for some working parents, than appearing to represent the interests of the "bra-burning feminists" at the back of Daniels's mind.

IV. CONCLUSION

In 1989, Victoria Brock, a member of the WMA and a resident of Hackney, penned an account for the organization's newsletter of her experience searching for a "way through the minefield of childcare solutions."[141] Brock

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told readers that while she would have liked to place her children in collective childcare, she had found few options available to her—a striking experience in a borough with as long and energetic a history of childcare activism as Hackney. In the absence of alternatives, Brock turned to the private market via what she described as "the unreal world" of a nanny agency and ultimately advertised in *The Lady* as follows: "young couple in Hackney, both working full-time, seek friendly informal carer to look after Archie (3) and Alastair (1). Occasional trips to Torbay and use of the family Cortina. Applicants must hold non-sexist and non-racist views. We are equal opportunity employers."

Brock was quick to make light of turning to a women's magazine with the aristocratic connotations of *The Lady* for help—yet as a middle-class working parent in London, she didn't know what else to do. As it turned out, the advertisement resulted in no offers of childcare. It was only when, in desperation, she called a local further education college that ran a training course for nursery workers, that she found a nanny for her children at the very last minute. In the context of cuts to both public and community nursery provision, in the mid-1980s, growing numbers of middle-class working mothers like Brock turned to nannies to provide care for their children.[142]

For most working parents in Britain, however, finding reliable, affordable childcare remained a nearly insurmountable struggle. In 1993, the DCT reported that more than three-quarters of working parents relied on family and friends for childcare because they could not find or afford formal childcare, "let alone childcare based on equal opportunities principles." While there had been gradual increases in the number of private sector nursery and childminding places in the late 1980s and early 1990s, this mattered little to families who could not pay for them.[143] Childminders continued to provide the majority of formal childcare places for children under five in Britain, and while they earned more on average than had been the case a decade earlier, they were still significantly underpaid and undervalued.[144] After two decades of robust childcare activism, in many ways little had changed in practice. Childcare in Britain remained a varied patchwork of radically inadequate options for struggling families.

To an extent, this reality reflected the fading of the left's commitment to community-based childcare activism from the mid-1980s onward in the context of targeted political attacks. Of course, hopes for a universal, community-driven model of care for Britain's under-fives did not disappear

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with the erosion of funding for grassroots projects. As we have seen, the pioneering Maxilla nursery continued to exist as a model into the early 2000s, and in modeling integrated provision for under-fives, it was not alone. However, the left's vision of remaking communities through antiracist and antisexist childcare, and liberating women through the socialization of caring responsibilities, proved to a large extent to be a casualty of the transformation of Britain's political economy. So too did a vision for the racial and class integration of communities, and of childcare providers and users, through community-minded reform.

The feminist organizations such as the DCT and the WMA that were most effectively lobbying the government for childcare reform by the late 1980s had begun to focus on the more limited goal of childcare as a necessity for enabling parents to work. They had also refocused on the educational needs of children rather than on the needs of women, much as Thatcher had done when she made the case for expanding nursery education in the early 1970s. Gone was the sense that the interests of children, mothers, parents, and childcare providers were fundamentally inseparable. For activists such as Helen Penn who had devoted years of activism to the NCCC, this shift in focus represented a failure "to create a better, more social, more creative life for young children and a collective and more democratic approach to childrearing" that activists had hoped for.[145]

Tensions regarding the role of antiracism, of the state, of professionals, and of men had long existed in activists' visions for remaking childcare in Britain. It was only in the mid-1980s, however, that feminist, and more broadly left, childcare activism for working parents inadvertently contributed to the construction of a system that prioritized diversity of childcare options, choice for families, and the professionalization of childcare work over all else. In 1991, the DCT had argued, among other things, for the value of "choice and diversity" in childcare. By 1995, the political currents had turned, and John Major, as prime minister, was referencing the need for a diversity of options in childcare provision. Members of the DCT were now quick to note that more diversity was not necessarily the answer: "Although the national picture may be one of diversity, all too often the local picture is one of restricted choice." Yet by the mid-1990s, it was too late.[146] A highly variable, inconsistent system of childcare provision was there to stay.

It would be easy to conclude in the context both of what preceded it and what followed that the childcare activism of the 1970s and early 1980s just

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didn't matter. As we have seen, however, feminists and left activists actively helped to construct the new status quo that existed by the early 1990s—in some instances furnishing the very language that defined the terms of the state's engagement with the question of childcare. In practice, activists' conflicts surrounding the role of the state helped to facilitate limited state action on childcare. Their broadly positive view of professionalization encouraged the development of what was to be a highly regulated, professionalized childcare sector—though hardly one that reflected feminists' highest hopes for communities or indeed for childcare workers. The language of working parenthood initially invoked by activists as part of a critique of the gendered division of labor later helped to obscure the gendered division of labor, as the specific challenges confronting mothers as workers and parents were rendered unspoken.

The activism of the 1970s and early 1980s also had other, more hopeful legacies. Despite the fractures in priorities among activists, the activism of this period reflected an unprecedentedly unified vision for the care and education of under-fives. In this sense, activists' debates and points of conflict helped to shape the contours of what was conceivable and forged a broad-based consensus around key features. In the crucible of left childcare activism, the historic distinction between daycare and education for young children was eroded as were distinctions between childminding and other forms of care.[147] From the mid-1970s onward, feminists, community activists, and childcare providers themselves emphasized the importance of regarding childcare work as work of value. Activists forged a more unified front that could make more unified demands—even if they never succeeded in transcending divisions of class and race or resolving their theoretical conflicts. The legacies of the left's vision for childcare were clearly apparent in the Sure Start centers instituted under New Labour and have survived in countless community projects then and since. Significantly more historical research is needed to trace the highly complex world of left childcare activism that emerged in the 1970s and to map its consequences for the childcare available to British families.

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2 FROM WOMEN'S LIBERATION TO NEW WAYS TO WORK: FEMINIST LABOR ACTIVISM AND THE MAKING OF WORKING PARENTHOOD

In July 1977, a small group of women began to meet informally in London to discuss the challenges of combining paid work and parenting. The initial members of what soon became the Job Sharing Project had met while enrolled in a full-time training course in community and youth work. Many were also caring for young children.[1] As founding member Adrienne Boyle reflected in a pamphlet published a few years later, "during that time most of us had exhausted ourselves trying to prove we could commit ourselves to as much work as anyone else. It didn't take us long to realize that full-time community work wouldn't exactly add to the quality of our lives."[2] As the network of women began to meet to explore the options available to them for continuing to pursue both the paid work for which they had trained and the caring responsibilities in their families, they found few options beyond what Boyle termed "live, sleep and eat the job."[3]

It was in this context that they first came across the idea of job sharing: the concept of two people formally dividing the responsibilities and benefits of one full-time position. Job sharing and the possibilities it offered for part-time employment with benefits, in a theoretically limitless range of positions, struck members of the group as an opportunity to pursue a broad set of goals. These ranged from increasing equality of opportunity for women in employment and transforming the gendered division of labor at home to challenging traditional attitudes toward work and providing workers of a variety of backgrounds with options likely to improve their everyday lives. The group turned its attention to researching and promoting job sharing as a new mode of working.

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Soon word of the group spread through the 1970s feminist activist milieu of which it was a part, and it grew to encompass a broader range of women, mostly with professional qualifications. By 1978, the group had secured a small pocket of funding from the fledgling Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) to support the cost of researching and publishing an initial guide to job sharing, and it had consolidated officially as the Job Sharing Project.[4] The same year, Pam Walton, who worked part-time at the EOC in Manchester and had recently joined the group, managed to arrange for its members to meet in the EOC premises in London rather than, as had previously been the case, in the front room of Boyle's housing co-op. In 1980 a grant of £4,000 from the EOC provided funds to hire Boyle as a part-time worker for the new organization to produce three further guides to job sharing for employees, employers, and unions, respectively.[5] Though never free from concerns about funding, in less than a decade, by the mid-1980s, the Job Sharing Project—renamed New Ways to Work (NWW) in 1981—had transformed itself from a small grassroots feminist project into a national charity with a degree of financial stability.[6]

Over the course of the early 1980s, NWW became Britain's key resource for individuals seeking guidance about negotiating job shares and other alternative work arrangements, and for information, advocacy, and consulting on what became known as flexible working more generally. In its first year of operation in 1978, NWW answered 402 inquiries from individuals and organizations seeking support; by 1984, the organization was answering more than twelve hundred, and by 1997 that figure had risen to three thousand.[7] Job sharing never became a predominate mode of working in Britain, though it did gain traction in some organizations in the 1980s and 1990s.[8] However, the concept of adapting and rendering flexible the structure of work to meet the needs of workers with caring responsibilities—particularly white-collar workers—profoundly reshaped both popular discussions of labor and public and private sector employment practice in Britain. While the Job Sharing Project (JSP) initially emerged from the experiences of working mothers, NWW became one of the earliest and most influential organizations in Britain to advocate explicitly for an ostensibly genderless group known as working parents.

This chapter considers the history of the JSP as a case study for thinking about the emergence and development of flexible work activism on behalf of working parents in Britain. It asks how and why an organization

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that arose out of second-wave feminism became oriented around the new notion of working parenthood, and it explores the tensions of class, race, and gender that became inscribed in campaigns for then largely unprecedented flexible work policies. It follows the trajectory of feminist calls to transform work from their origins in campaign activism into the apparatus of new charities and unions across an era of evaporating funding for activist projects, Conservative labor policies, and rising economy uncertainty. It aims to shed light on the fate of the feminist project to remake the gendered experience of work both paid and unpaid across the 1980s.

When it first came about in the late 1970s, the JSP was one of a number of campaigns drawing attention to the growing issue of mothers' needs as workers. The dramatic expansion of mothers' paid work in the postwar period posed escalating problems for care in communities. Compounded by shifting family structures, in particular the rising rates of divorce and single parenthood, this proved highly generative of new forms of activism.[9] A wide variety of feminist projects—from the campaign for a universal basic income and the campaign for a housework wage, to the movement for a working women's charter, to local experiments in collective living and working, and to legal reform and the new institutions such as the EOC that came in its wake—sought to project new ideals in practice.[10] Feminists drew attention to issues of equal pay, workplace harassment, the double shift, and childcare and insisted that time itself was political. Campaigns to transform work and the gendered division of labor ranged from the highly pragmatic to the radically utopian. While many sought to reform labor through the conventional instruments of the state, law, and trade unions, some, including the JSP, also looked outside of these traditional institutions.

The idea of rethinking the structures of paid work to better suit the needs of women workers did not emerge without precedent in the women's liberation movement (WLM) in the late 1970s. Earlier in that decade, a handful of voices in Britain had begun to advocate for more flexible and part-time work options to allow women with professional qualifications to remain in the workforce after having children.[11] Research emerging from the European Economic Community that followed in the mid-1970s suggested that flexibility in working hours was the single measure most likely to improve women's professional opportunities.[12] From the early 1970s onward, flexitime policies designed to give blue- and white-collar workers some options about work start and end times around a set of core hours had begun to

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emerge in Britain and elsewhere in Europe—particularly in the public sector.[13] While these policies endowed workers with a greater sense of control over their days, they generally had little effect on overall hours worked.[14]

Unions nonetheless acknowledged their particular value to women workers, who by 1979 comprised 30 percent of total union membership in Britain.[15] As early as November 1972, at the behest of female members, the British Trades Union Congress (TUC) had sought the views of its affiliated unions on the possibility of pushing for more flexibility in arranging work time.[16] Overall, unions expressed trepidation about doing so, lest calls for new ways of organizing work time undermine traditional demands for higher wages and collective pay.[17] Unions likewise steered clear of focusing on part-time work, despite its growing significance in the overall labor market, on the basis of concerns about creating more "second class jobs."[18]

Unions' hesitancy to foreground the issues of part time and flexible work of greatest concern to their women members were only heightened in the early 1980s. In 1979, unemployment hit a postwar high of 1.3 million, comprising 5.6 percent of the workforce.[19] It increased further following the 1980–1981 recession, reaching more than 3 million—some 11 percent of the workforce—in 1983.[20] Even after the recession ended in 1982, unemployment continued to increase to a peak of 3.2 million in 1985.[21] The Conservative labor policies that contributed to these figures particularly threatened the traditionally male, full-time jobs that had long formed the backbone of union membership. If the constituency of British unions was shifting, it was not yet happening quickly enough.

In the absence of leadership on work options for workers with caring responsibilities from within the traditional labor movement, feminist activists looked both to ad hoc arrangements that existed in Britain and to international models for inspiration. As the initial members of the JSP began to research new ways of working that might alleviate the tensions between paid work and caring responsibilities, they gathered accounts dating back to the early 1970s of individuals in Britain who had negotiated job shares with their employers. These were exceptional arrangements rather than widely accepted practices.[22] While job sharing remained highly sporadic in Britain in the late 1970s, the concept had by that time gained some traction in the United States.[23]

In the US, women's rates of paid employment in the postwar period had risen even earlier and to a greater extent than was the case in Britain.[24] While

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unions proved no more willing or able to champion new work arrangements as bargaining priorities in the US context, by 1972, American activists based in San Francisco had founded the nonprofit New Ways to Work San Francisco (NWW SF) with the goal to "improve the quality of working life and expand job opportunities by developing innovative employment practices."[25] By 1977, the organization had published on the concept of job sharing and highlighted a range of existing job-sharing schemes. From the mid-1970s onward, experimental pilot projects were conducted in locations ranging from California to Wisconsin, involving as many as two thousand employees.[26] These projects largely occurred in the public sector—in cities, counties, and schools—but job sharing had also begun to appear in larger private sector firms in the US including the pharmaceutical company Alza Corporation, the semiconductor firm Signetics, and the electronics company Hewlett Packard.[27] In 1979, NWW SF reported that job shares existed among city planners, engineers, career counselors, social workers, mental health workers, doctors, and librarians as well as other professions.[28]

It was principally feminist activism with both domestic and international roots, rather than the traditional labor movement, that popularized the concept of job sharing, and later flexible work more broadly, in Britain. The JSP, which took the new name NWW borrowed from the San Francisco organization in 1981, was representative of what Matthew Hilton has described as the new centrality of nongovernmental political actors in the postwar period.[29] Where the state and the labor movement, and indeed employers, had failed to take action to resolve the mounting crisis of care in Britain, new organizations filled the gap. But the development of NWW during the 1980s also tells another story. The JSP was not unique in the late 1970s in drawing attention to the challenges faced by women in paid work or in imagining alternatives, but it proved remarkably adept in doing so across a period of time that historians have tended to view as one of decline in women's activism in Britain.[30] The organization was committed to finding immediate, practical solutions to the pressing problems of women in the workforce and to the broader aim of radically challenging the gendered division of labor. The ways in which this feminist project adapted and endured as the political-economic terrain shifted underfoot reveals the possibilities and limitations of feminist activism in the neoliberal era.

Over the course of the 1980s, NWW began to concentrate less on its initial focus on job sharing and more on what was becoming the politically

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salient notion of flexibility. The shifting demands of NWW's outreach and fundraising also encouraged the organization to frame its agenda increasingly in terms of the needs of working parents and of workers generally rather than of working women with children specifically. Moreover, it pushed NWW to focus on the needs of professional, largely middle-class, white women at the expense of what they had initially hoped would be a focus on the realities and needs of all women workers. If the JSP had from the very beginning been oriented toward addressing the challenges of women with professional training—a disproportionality white and middle-class group—this became all the more the case as support for radical activism dried up. As NWW mobilized the concept of working parenthood in its activism across a period of significant change in Britain's political economy, it helped to define the promise and limitations of the notion for transforming everyday life in the decades to come.

I. A PRAGMATIC PROJECT WITH RADICAL PROMISE

The JSP began as a pragmatic project with radical promise. It emerged from the frustrations of an upwardly mobile group of women who were actively seeking to shape a new way of life as professionals with caring responsibilities. Today, we tend to think of job sharing as a one relatively minor example of a wide range of flexible work options. But in the 1970s, its particular qualities captured the imagination of activists with critical legacies for the ongoing efforts to remake the structures of work.

Pam Walton was one such activist. When she first got in touch with the job-sharing group that was forming in London in 1977, she was stressed. Walton had felt strongly since childhood that she wanted to pursue a career, and now with a young child, she was finding it extremely taxing to do so. Walton was born in 1947 in North Buckinghamshire and grew up with the sense that her mother, who had stayed at home to raise her and her brother while her father went to work, lived a restrictive life. In 1967 Walton moved to London to study geography at Queen Mary University, where she was the first in her family to attend university. Although she met her future husband, Gary, as a student, she delayed marrying until 1972, spurred by the feeling that women's position in society was changing.

After completing a postgraduate course in town planning, Walton got her first job as a planner for the London Borough of Westminster. She

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remained there for two-and-a-half years until she and Gary decided to leave London for a more self-sufficient life in the countryside. Walton took a job at the Welsh Water Authority, and the couple relocated to Llanwrda, in rural South Wales. There, Walton found herself the only female planner on a staff of nine men. Walton remembers feeling "a desperate need to talk about all sorts of issues with women." Once a month she drove an hour after work to attend a women's group she had learned about through her subscription to the feminist magazine *Spare Rib*. Although she felt alienated at work, Walton enjoyed planning.[31]

Initially, Walton was reluctant to have a child, lest it compromise her professional ambitions. It was only after the Employment Protection Act was passed in 1975, guaranteeing paid maternity leave for the first time, that she had felt emboldened to have a baby knowing that she would be able to return to work. Her son Kai was born in 1976, and for the first year of his life, much had gone to plan. While Walton commuted forty-five minutes to work and was out of the house from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., Gary cared for Kai at home, tended their small farm, and did occasional part-time work crafting musical instruments. In other regards, however, things were not working. It was clear to Walton that her husband was unhappy being home while she was out for long hours. Meanwhile, she felt rundown. She and Gary had both wanted to work part time so that they could share the upbringing of their son, and this was proving significantly more difficult than they had hoped. A conviction that there must be a better solution drove her to research other options.

Walton wrote to a former town-planning colleague, Ines Newman, in London. She knew that Newman had managed to negotiate a job share after taking maternity leave. Through Newman, Walton got in touch with Boyle and her group and also learned about the existence of job-sharing schemes in the United States. As she began to research them, she discovered and contacted NWW SF for information that she could take to her employer to propose a job share.[32] Walton was well prepared when she went to her boss. She had put together a case in support of her proposal and had identified another planner who wanted to job share with her in her existing position.

Walton's boss was supportive, but the chief executive of the Welsh Water Authority wouldn't consider a job share.[33] When Walton presented him with materials from NWW SF demonstrating the feasibility of job-sharing arrangements in various organizations, he scoffed. "They might do that

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kind of thing in America," she remembers him saying, "but we don't here."[34] Walton and her partner had moved to Wales only a couple of years earlier and had set up a life there. Now, with no prospects of either of them finding part-time work that matched their training, they were faced with relocating once again. Walton left the job and moved to Sheffield with her family in the hopes of building a more satisfactory life elsewhere.

When the JSP came together in London in 1977, it became clear that Walton's experience was far from exceptional. As the group set about researching job sharing, they uncovered just a handful of existing schemes in Britain. Under the name "twining," job sharing had taken place at Barclay's Bank since the 1940s for women employed in clerical and administrative work, and the Lothian Health Board in Scotland had run a scheme for shared hospital medical posts since the late 1960s. However, as the JSP reported in a 1980 newsletter, "no accurate figures exist on the current number of jobs which are shared, because it is predominately an individualized work arrangement, negotiated between the sharers and an employer."[35] Employers who permitted job-sharing arrangements as a matter of policy were rare in Britain in the late 1970s. Far more frequently, individuals seeking alternative work arrangements were at the mercy of their bosses and of the labor market more broadly. The activists who came together to advocate for job sharing set out to transform this reality.

Like Walton, Adrienne Boyle had been unable to find part-time work in her professional field. Upon completing her community work qualification in 1977, Boyle was confronted instead, as a single mother, with the prospect of taking on unskilled work that would accommodate her caring responsibilities. Boyle was born in 1946 and had grown up one of eight children in a working-class family in inner city Dublin and had nurtured a strong sense of the injustices of poverty. By the late 1970s, she was involved in a wide range of radical activities in London, where she had first come to study.

Reflecting on the early years of the JSP in the context of her political activism, Boyle remembers that "it was one of those things—you know—this isn't right. We've done all of these qualifications and just because we're women we can't have a decent job. We're just as capable as anyone else, you know. So it's not like the Vietnams of the world . . . the fight against that kind of injustice, but it's a different kind of one that you have a lifelong commitment to. And at a gut level when you experience it yourself."[36]

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Experiences like Walton's and Boyle's galvanized the new group. When the activists of the JSP learned in December 1979 of "two skilled and experienced workers" in Sheffield who were "refused a job because they wanted to share it," they responded by organizing a seminar for local individuals interested in job sharing and invited employers and union representatives who were open to learning more.[37]

Walton and Boyle were typical of those who formed the membership of the JSP in its early years.[38] Both were from the first generation of women in their families who had had the opportunity to pursue professional training and work. Born in the late 1940s and demographic beneficiaries of the expansion of the British university system in the 1960s, which saw particular gains for women, they were also the first of either sex in their families to attend university.[39] In addition to the opportunities afforded by university educations, Walton, Boyle, and the other members of the group were shaped personally and politically by the aspirations of the women's movement for equal opportunities, legal and financial independence from men, and for self-realization and personal fulfillment.[40]

While most of the initial members were women and indeed mothers, including a number of single mothers, there were also men involved from the outset. Drew Stevenson, a father and a senior town planner who had mentored Walton in her first planning job at Westminster, was an early member of the group and a committed feminist. The original members of the JSP were bound by other similarities as well. Most had backgrounds in town planning, community work, and social work—fields located within or with close ties to government. They drew on their disciplinary training in conceptualizing the relationship between structures, design, and communities as they envisioned new models of labor. The members of the JSP were all white and had, or aspired to, middle-class jobs. However, they were not exclusively from middle-class backgrounds, nor were they concerned exclusively with transforming professional work.

Although shaped by middle-class aspirations, the activists of the JSP were acutely aware that the promise of paid work to deliver independence and satisfaction was far from reality for the growing numbers of women in employment. The working-class black and immigrant women who had long worked for pay in Britain continued to occupy the lowest paid, female-dominated sectors of the economy, and the rise in the number of women in paid work by the 1970s had been driven in large part by the expansion

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of part-time employment for white middle-class mothers in these very sectors.[41] As women with professional qualifications and with the desire and the need to pursue paid work, they had found themselves faced nonetheless with the problems typical of the forms of labor that had long been working women's prerogative. Work that was available on a part-time basis, which could be combined most easily with childrearing, was low paying and characterized by both a lack of opportunity for advancement and exclusion from benefits such as sick pay, pensions, and, in some sectors, unionization.

The JSP concluded that women's ability to escape this set of choices depended, at a minimum. upon the availability of part-time employment at higher skill and income levels. They insisted that all jobs should be open to job sharers as well as to full-time employees. In addition, full-time workers should have the right to transition to job shares without loss of status, security, and benefits. Job sharers should be entitled to full job security under the Employment Protection Act and to comparable pro rata pay and benefits as full-time employees. Any decision-making meetings, and where applicable union branch meetings, should be scheduled such that job sharers could take equal part. Above all, the group demanded that "job-sharers should not have lower status and responsibilities than comparable full-timers."[42]

In promoting job sharing as a potential solution to the problems women encountered in paid work, the JSP made two related claims. First, it suggested that job sharing could help all women—not only those disproportionately white middle-class women in professional occupations—by elevating the status of part-time work, rendering it more difficult for employers to "exploit the vast pool of women looking for part-time work." Second, it claimed that women stayed in low pay and status jobs because those jobs afforded them flexible hours. It reported that it heard "constantly . . . from highly experienced administrative workers who take jobs as cleaners, launderette workers, being paid a pittance, because the job they have been trained to do won't consider part-time working."[43] Through a trickle-down theory of job improvement, the JSP proposed that changes in the availability of part-time work at a skilled level would improve the status of women's work generally.

The members of the JSP hoped that this set of changes would form the groundwork for a transformation in the gendered division of labor. Alongside a vision of women entering satisfying paid work on a basis that did not

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FIGURE 2.1
Dinner's in the Oven! Image by Chris Meade. Courtesy of Adrienne Boyle Personal Archive.

require them to abandon other desires and responsibilities, the JSP articulated a vision of men entering the home to share equally in household labor. As Boyle noted in a 1981 pamphlet, "if . . . you have the option of work, half-time work with reasonable pay, in these days of lip service to equal opportunity it is much more difficult for one partner to refuse to share the chores."[44] In keeping with this vision, in its early years the JSP frequently drew attention to examples of couples who shared jobs as if to emphasize implicitly as well as explicitly its aim of transforming intimate as much as public life (figure 2.1).[45]

Also underlying the groups' idealism in the late 1970s was a broader aim of remaking community. In notes prepared for an interview on *Woman's Hour* in August 1980, the group described a doubtless exceptional example of women sharing both a job and the breastfeeding of their young children. In doing so, asserted the need to value and create space for caring activities.[46] While the activism of the JSP emerged from the particular concerns of working mothers, it contained from the very beginning an impulse to speak for the interest of working parents and for workers and communities more generally when it demanded new modes of labor.

There were several reasons why the concept of job sharing, rather than the idea of flexible work hours, inspired Britain's first activists for new ways

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of working. From the outset, the JSP emphasized the need for a diversity of new working arrangements, and yet job sharing became its focus. When the group came together in 1977, it had only limited knowledge of the existing involvement of British unions with questions of part-time and flexible work. In 1981, several years the wiser, Boyle reflected that the group had been all but "unaware of the legal position of part-timers or their position within the trade union machinery."[47]

Instead, the JSP operated simply from the premise of finding immediate, practical solutions to resolve the sorts of conflicts experienced by women with professional training. It was in part for practical reasons that the organization seized upon the idea of job sharing; unlike flexible hours, it promised less total working time and had some precedent within Britain and internationally. Job sharing also appeared the most pragmatic choice in another respect. It struck members of the group as presenting the opportunity to challenge the hegemony of the forty-hour, 9-to-5 work week without demanding a wholesale revolution in existing structures of work. Job sharing seemed a pragmatic move in the right direction—chief among several possibilities for generating new options. As Boyle noted, "we might not need to share jobs if we had legislation that allowed parents to shorten their working day."[48] Job sharing was a place to start.

As much as it struck the founders of the JSP as a pragmatic starting point, job sharing also captured the organization's idealism and radical ambitions in a way that the notion of flexible work hours alone did not. The practice of job sharing promised to encode work with a new set of values. Job sharers could not be "egotistical or possessive" as Walton put it; sharing the responsibilities of a position required, ideally, teamwork and downplayed egos.[49] It thrived when individuals possessed complementary skills, and it rewarded the mutual respect of working collaboratively rather than the individualism of working alone. It promised to be a "more social way of working."[50] Contained within the idea of job sharing was an idealized notion of partnership—a companionate marriage writ into the paid working day. It was also importantly a genderless notion of partnership: job sharers could be couples who shared paid work and the life of home and family, pairs of women such as those described on *Woman's Hour* in 1980 who had banded together to share aspects of childcare as well as their paid jobs, or indeed any two people who wished to collaborate over the joint project of work. Along with many of the other possibilities feminists considered as they

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came together with the aim of remaking work in the 1970s, job sharing had a utopian quality.

II. A NEW KIND OF MIDDLE-CLASS LABOR ACTIVISM

That utopian quality persisted in the early work of the JSP, but it also began to run into a range of practical considerations. By 1979, the JSP had consolidated its key functions and secured initial financial support with a grant from the EOC. Between 1979 and late 1981, when a grant from the new Greater London Council (GLC) afforded the group previously unprecedented financial security and an office space, the project developed rapidly. It evolved from an entirely voluntary group to a staff of four employees sharing two posts on a job share basis, supported by a management committee and a volunteer base. Its main role became responding to individual inquiries and requests for assistance vis-à-vis employers.

This work was supported by a second key focus—researching and self-publishing booklets on job sharing and other flexible working arrangements. It was research into job sharing that afforded the JSP access to initial pockets of funding from organizations with a shared interest in the changing nature of women's work. The JSP also set about using its new research to convince employers and unions of the feasibility of alternative modes of working. Integral to these aims, as well as to securing financial support, was the work of engaging the press in generating positive publicity about job sharing.[51] Over the course of this formative two-year period, the JSP became increasingly absorbed with the work of responding to individual inquiries and strategizing about how to garner employer and union support and, critically, funding. In the process, their activism evolved into what they would later worry had become overly "demand oriented."[52]

As the JSP established itself as a working campaign, a careful formulation of its theoretical aims gradually became subsidiary to its more immediate work as it shaped a new kind of middle-class labor activism in practice. In its emerging role as a charity, the JSP achieved a degree of success in establishing job sharing as a viable mode of working.[53] But its vision of transforming work to the benefit of workers with caring responsibilities also began to collide with the realities of existing union and employer practice in the early 1980s, with important consequences for who the group would come to serve and to what ends.

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When the JSP first formed in 1977, news of the campaign spread principally by word of mouth through the personal networks of the WLM. After Adrienne Boyle penned a piece introducing the concept of job sharing in *Spare Rib* in June 1978, inquiries picked up pace.[54] From the outset, the activists of the JSP understood that generating publicity would be critical, and they took every opportunity to engage the press' interest. This proved highly successful. In 1978, the JSP saw press coverage in mainstream newspapers—including pieces in the *Telegraph*, the *Observer*, and the *Guardian*.[55]

In an indication of the importance the JSP ascribed to this media interest, the group kept track of the number of inquiries and responses it received for each article published. The almost universally favorable stories on job sharing that appeared in national publications in the late 1970s rapidly widened the demographic base of those who contacted the group for information.[56] In 1980 and 1981, publications as diverse and geographically wide-ranging as Sheffield's *Morning Telegraph*, the *Glasgow Herald*, *Durham Chronicle*, *Irish Independent*, *The Telegraph*, *The Daily Mail*, and *Cosmopolitan Magazine* published on job sharing.[57] A number of stories on job sharing also aired on BBC Radio for the first time.[58]

Coverage of job sharing in the media ran the gamut from career-specific pieces on job-sharing teachers to articles on job sharing as a new women's issue to coverage that focused on job sharing as an employment and business concern and new mode of working imported from abroad.[59] Most often, job sharing was framed as an issue of changing patterns of work that were of particular, though not exclusive, significance to women workers who were portrayed implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, as having caring responsibilities. Mainstream publications tended not to characterize job sharing as part of a feminist project to transform the gendered division of labor, preferring to focus on its guise as a pragmatic possibility for restructuring paid work. However, job sharing was often portrayed, in keeping with the JSP's aims, as having bearing on the issue of changing gender roles, intimate relationships, and parenting. As one BBC Radio commentator put it in 1981, job sharing, with its requirements of compromise, communication, and mutual respect, was "a bit like a marriage."[60] Other commentators emphasized that job sharing presented a unique opportunity for couples who wanted to bring up children together.[61] It was perhaps because job sharing spoke to the popular sense that something important was shifting

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with both work and gendered expectations of women and men that the issue generated such ready and varied media interest.

By 1979, in the context of mounting press coverage, inquiries to the JSP came from all over Britain and occasionally from Ireland, Europe, and even further afield. They included both requests for information on job sharing generally and requests for potential job share partners specifically. The JSP recorded interest and sought to match potential sharers based on occupation and location. By January 1981, it had established an official register to facilitate this process. A majority of interest in job sharing came from parents, and three-quarters of inquires continued to come from women, though with national press coverage, the JSP increasingly heard from men, including nonparents too.[62]

Inquiries came from individuals with a wide range of occupations including teachers, civil servants, librarians, probation officers, doctors, academics, and typists, among others. In 1980, teachers and administrative workers combined accounted for nearly 50 percent of inquiries. Between 1978 and 1980, the JSP also heard from a growing number of researchers, personnel officers, youth and career advisers, employment agencies, union representatives, and others with a vested interest in unemployment rates as much as in understanding emerging models of work. Of the 1,089 inquiries the JSP received in 1980, approximately 600 came from individuals seeking advice or assistance, 27 from unions, and 25 from employers—primarily local government authorities.[63]

The JSP's aim to deliver practical advice to those who needed it on demand was supported by its research and strategic work. The first such advice to be dispensed widely came in the form of Boyle's 1978 leaflet "How to Sell Yourself as a Job-Sharer."[64] Written based on the JSP's developing understanding of the potential advantages and disadvantages of job-sharing arrangements from employers' perspectives, the leaflet sought to equip workers with the information they needed to negotiate the best arrangements possible. Between 1978 and 1981, grant funding enabled the JSP to explore in detail the concerns of employees, employers, and unions when it came to arranging job shares and to develop resources tailored more specifically to incoming inquiries.

With the first research funding from the EOC in 1979, Boyle set out to produce a reference document that covered the feasibility of job sharing for employees and employers and looked at the potential consequences for

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government.[65] She considered the potential effects of job sharing on state benefits, negotiated benefits, and employment rights and proposed guidelines for employers. She also anticipated a concern that would become more pronounced the following year, noting that "because it only offers half a wage, however good that wage" job sharing could not "be seen as an answer to current employment trends"—in other words, growing unemployment.[66] Helping employees to negotiate job shares depended upon convincing employers to rethink their policies. Persuading employers in turn depended upon producing evidence of job sharing's value. As the JSP became increasingly engaged in working with employers, it established itself in a role as liaison between their interests and the needs of employees.

By 1980, the JSP was actively courting employers. To do so it invoked a two-pronged strategy of assuaging potential concerns and highlighting examples of best practice. At the beginning, referencing best practice meant pointing to the existence of job sharing abroad.[67] As the JSP learned about successful job share arrangements within Britain, those too were put forth as exemplary. While the activists of the JSP began to address themselves to any employers who would listen, they remained wedded to the interests of employees. From the very beginning, the women who came together to discuss the need for new models of work had worried that any idea they came up with might be captured by employers or simply be presented as a concession and later invoked to place higher burdens on employees in other areas.[68] This remained a pressing concern.

While in some ways activists began to draw nearer to the agendas of employers as they increasingly sought to collaborate with them, intellectually they remained highly critical of the commercial world of the early 1980s. In November 1980, Boyle attended a launch party for the new organization Women in Management, which was intended as a support network for women in top-level positions. When she reported back to the members of the JSP on the launch event, she could barely contain a tone of mockery. She sarcastically lauded speakers for having said things like, "girls have to try harder at school" and "women have had an inability to demonstrate that they can get there," and concluded that, "for our purposes trying to promote flexibility through that source is a dead loss."[69] In the late 1980s and early 1990s, NWW had begun to work closely with corporate employers—including around flexible options for women in high-level management roles, but in 1980 that remained a distant prospect.

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The employers who registered interest in job sharing in the early years of the JSP came predominately from the public sector.[70] It was several local authority councils, in particular, that first became receptive to the notion of rethinking the imperative of full-time work. It would be easy to overstate the degree of change that occurred even in the most progressive councils in these years. While numerous local councils had official job-sharing schemes in place by the mid-1980s, these had a slow start. In 1980, members of the JSP were invited by the London Borough of Lewisham to a meeting of the council's employment subcommittee to discuss micro-technology, its effect on local authority jobs, and how job sharing might fit into the picture.[71] The meeting was a nonstarter; it became clear that the council wasn't interested in job sharing as such but rather in cutting jobs.[72] However, by August of the same year, the project had worked with the management of Hackney Borough Council, alongside their Equal Opportunities Officer John Carr, to consider job sharing as an option for women returning to work after maternity leave.[73]

By 1981, they had also succeeded in helping Hackney to agree to a more expansive job-sharing policy through their equal opportunities framework though not without tremendous wrangling.[74] In addition, in 1981, the JSP began to work actively with London Transport and to provide advice and support to local councils in the London Borough of Lambeth and in Sheffield, Manchester, Darlington, Birmingham, and Milton Keynes.[75] Characteristically, it was only in mid-1983 that the famously left-wing Sheffield City Council introduced an official job-sharing policy after years of lobbying by local groups with the support of the JSP.[76] Job sharing gained acceptance unevenly, in particular locales, and only fitfully over the course of the early 1980s.

Working closely with local councils in this period brought the JSP into direct contact with unions for the first time, and this would have important consequences for the evolution of flexible work activism in Britain. From the early 1970s onward, British trade unions had acknowledged that new approaches to structuring working time offered some benefits to workers, even while they highlighted the potential pitfalls of pushing for flexitime as a matter of policy. White-collar unions, which had a significantly higher proportion of female members than their blue-collar counterparts, tended to view the possibility of new approaches to work time more favorably. By 1970, 50 percent of the members of the National and Local Government

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and Officers Association (NALGO) were women, and although women remained significantly underrepresented in union leadership, by 1974 the union had organized an equal opportunities committee for the first time.[77] In 1973, the Civil and Public Services Union (CPSA), which had nearly 120,000 women members comprising more than half of its membership, acknowledged that, "many of them have domestic commitments which might be rendered more manageable by the introduction of great flexibility in hours of attendance."[78] When the JSP found itself working alongside unions, it had some reason to be optimistic.

The JSP's first direct work with unions began in January 1980, when Helen Sunderland, a group member who shared a job in the London Borough of Lambeth, reached out to the local branch of NALGO to propose a union branch policy in support of job sharing. The branch's Equal Opportunities Committee prepared a policy statement agreeing that all jobs should be open to job shares. The policy passed through the executive committee, and the JSP celebrated its first success in rallying unions to their cause.[79] In March 1980, the JSP also made what appeared to be some initial headway with NALGO at the national level. Tess Woodcraft, a research officer from NALGO's headquarters, agreed to include questions on job sharing in a national survey of over nine thousand local government employees looking at sex discrimination.[80] This promised to provide the JSP with previously unprecedented information on the number of existing public sector job shares and a gauge of interest in job sharing as an alternative mode of working.

Over the course of 1980, NALGO took the issue of job sharing, alongside the matters of flexible hours and childcare, increasingly to heart. In 1981, the union published a negotiating kit for working parents, in those terms, for the first time. The pamphlet described job sharing as "an exciting development in part-time work," and most strikingly, it echoed the radical hope of the JSP that job sharing would help to restructure expectations about the gendered division of labor at home. NALGO told parents that women working for pay might also expect their husbands to share household chores.[81]

Despite these initial successes in encouraging unions to consider job sharing specifically, and the needs of working women and parents more generally, the JSP also encountered push back. The very same week that Woodcraft informed the JSP about the inclusion of job-sharing questions in NALGO's national survey in 1980, Pam Walton heard from a NALGO

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district officer in Essex warning about the dangers of suggesting that jobs be shared at a moment when the labor market was contracting.[82] At a July 1980 meeting, the JSP acknowledged that it was encountering difficulty in "involving unions in the whole idea of flexibility in employment."[83] In response, it modulated its strategy. The group agreed that its best hope lay in trying to influence unions at the national level by documenting what was occurring in branches where job sharing was viewed, for whatever reasons, more favorably. Drawing on its experiences with Hackney, the group also agreed to focus on specific cases, such as the right to return to work after maternity leave on a job-sharing basis.[84] By targeting particular negotiated agreements where less than full-time employees were treated less favorably than full-timers, it hoped to apply additional pressure to encourage unions to rethink their policies.[85]

They nonetheless faced major obstacles. In March 1981, Woodcraft indicated that for the time being, despite its willingness to speak out on behalf of working parents and even job sharing in general terms, NALGO's official position on job sharing was being left to local branches. While she implied that the union would work to support part-timers, she could not offer a positive commitment.[86] This was typical of unions' stances to job sharing in these years. In September 1981, the JSP also ran into skepticism from the National Union of Teachers (NUT). After a meeting with the union's women's officer, Jean Farral, the group reported that while she had done a great deal for women over the years, she was "extremely reticent about the relevance of p/t or j/s."[87]

In October 1981, when the TUC's Women's Advisory Committee considered the EOC's booklet on job sharing, it acknowledged its potential benefits, particularly for working parents, but noted that "it would appear that in normal circumstances job sharers will tend to be either the very highly paid, or women, one-parent families, the disabled, etc.—those who are present time are only able to take part-time work, for a variety of reasons."[88] The traditional focus of unions on full-time work shaped the group's hesitancy, but so too did its insistence that not all workers could afford to job share and, implicitly, the suggestion that job sharing was a fundamentally middle-class agenda. That it was also a largely white agenda was far from their concerns. By 1981, the JSP's initial hopes of addressing all categories of women's work had in fact largely given way to a focus on the white-collar work that was largely the prerogative of white middle-class women.

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In practice, the group was able to develop contacts almost exclusively at white-collar unions such as NUT, the National Association of Probation Officers, the National Union of Public Employees, and the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs.

In December 1981 the JSP concluded that unions simply weren't engaging seriously with job sharing because of "traditional attitudes to the 40 hour work ethic and an underlying attitude that any work, or worker, who is less than full-time is not 'serious'"[89] Echoing earlier waves of feminist activism, the JSP criticized unions for their blindness to gender. In doing so, the group evoked the experiences of women as parents and took aim at the primacy of class over all else in unions' conceptions of labor, noting that "people with children are at a disadvantage in the job market. Anyone who wants to work less than full-time on an equal footing is discriminated against in law and in biased (to full-time) trade union agreements. It doesn't matter whether you're middle class or working class."[90] The JSP and Britain's unions had reached an impasse—at least at the level of policy.

Despite its frustrations, the JSP did not abandon its efforts to work with unions. Instead, as it continued to lobby unions for their support, it also worked where necessary outside of and alongside traditional labor organizing. In Hackney, where it had successfully orchestrated the development of a job-sharing policy in 1980, the JSP managed to circumvent entirely the need to engage with the local NALGO branch. Furthermore, it continued to support individuals in taking their demands for job shares to employers, with or without union support. In this regard, the JSP embodied an alternative form of labor activism, shaped by different class politics and different experiences of labor from the mainstream labor movement but nonetheless concerned with the collective transformation of the conditions of work.[91]

While the JSP carved out this new role, its encounter with union criticism, and indeed criticisms of job sharing more generally, also informed efforts to reflect on the direction of its work. In late March 1980 six group members came together to consider the wide-ranging criticisms of job sharing emerging from unions, childcare campaigners, and other feminists.[92] These ranged from the suggestion that job sharing was "middle class rubbish" to the argument that it was an individualizing rather than collective solution to the problems of care work, and the charge that it was unlikely to actually challenge the division of labor.[93] The group raised questions about whether it was right to encourage more women to take on paid work

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knowing full well that for many this would simply result in higher workloads as they continued to shoulder a disproportionate share of household labor. One participant bemoaned the fact that "in one breath we're being accused of being part of the movement which is sending women back to the home and in the other of bringing women on to the market." Another chimed in to remind the group that the notion that job sharing was just for people with very young children, implicitly mothers, was an unfair assumption to begin with—job sharing might be particularly valuable to parents, but it was for everyone. While the conversation pointed to a variety of challenges the JSP would continue to face in promoting alternative models of work, it raised far more questions than it answered.

The JSP was founded as a pragmatically oriented project and, even as the organization raised theoretical questions about its direction, pragmatic it remained.[94] If nothing else, the ongoing need to secure funding all but guaranteed this. Discussions about the aims and agenda of the JSP in 1980 and 1981 nonetheless shaped new strategic approaches on the part of the group. In September 1981, the JSP achieved a major break when it secured three years of funding from the Economic Development Committee of the new GLC. The GLC funding corresponded with a change in name and image.[95] In September the JSP announced, "We are now New Ways to Work, cribbed from the American project of the same name and doing the same thing here."[96]

The new name and its promise of better possibilities reflected the group's long-standing utopian ambitions. In assuming a new name that linked its work explicitly to the flexible work activism of NWW SF, the British NWW also lay claim to a new agenda. The funding secured likewise wedded the organization to a new work routine. Through its wide net, the financial backing of the GLC brought NWW into contact with a new set of activists and projects. It also provided the space for the activists of NWW to reflect on the project's more long-term financial prospects.[97] For a time, at least, the GLC provided the financial foundation from which flexible work activism in Britain could continue.

The arrival of GLC funding also paralleled the implementation of a job-sharing scheme for GLC employees. NWW grew at this juncture in its role as an employer advisory body emphasizing the need for training, publicity, and monitoring to ensure that the scheme was put into effect properly.[98] Although GLC funding only supported the costs of NWW's London work,

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its income freed organizers to take up more national work on a voluntary basis. For Boyle, the victory of securing this support was enough to assure the future of the project in her eyes. With that, she was ready for a change and left the group to take a job in her original field of community work at the beginning of 1982.[99] Pam Walton remained to see NWW come to full fruition.

III. BECOMING A FLEXIBLE WORK CHARITY

The JSP's change of name to New Ways to Work in the autumn of 1981 corresponded to a shift in focus. The decision to assume a new name and consciously craft a new image emerged out of the criticisms confronting the JSP, including from within its own membership. Reflecting on the debates that took place around the idea of job sharing in 1981, Pam Walton remembers that there were some within the group "who felt we shouldn't be even pushing job sharing. We should be going more for a reduced work-time week, working from home part of the time, all that sort of thing, so more and more at our meetings we were saying well, look: It isn't just job sharing that we're fighting for. We want to fight for different ways of organizing work . . . flexible working."[100] In searching for a new name to reflect this agenda, the activists of the JSP kept returning to the leaflets they had gathered since the late 1970s from NWW SF. Eventually, with permission from the American group, they settled on the new name (figure 2.2).

Job sharing had been from the outset a strategy for opening full-time jobs to individuals who could not or did not wish to work on that basis; now the JSP indicated that it would consciously look toward other strategies including leave time, voluntary reduced working time, sabbaticals, and term-time working. In the process, activists began to place less emphasis on the specific challenges and needs of mothers and more on the needs of parents and of workers more generally. Meanwhile, they continued largely to sidestep the touchy issues of class and race that often went unspoken in their work. Ultimately, the cost of a broader focus on flexible work was a shift away from the most radical vision of job sharing as a liberating alternative to conventional work.

While a range of criticisms of job sharing drove the evolution of NWW's focus in these years, there was one issue in particular that was overwhelmingly important in shaping its new direction. In 1981, the Conservative

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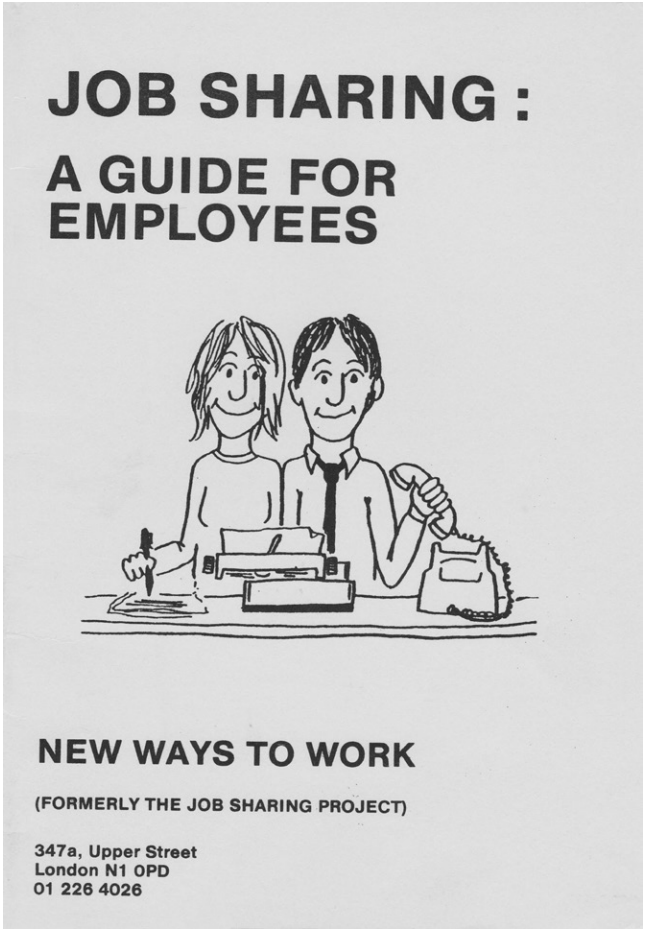

FIGURE 2.2
New Ways to Work. Image by Chris Meade from "Job Sharing: A Guide for Employees" (Sheffield Women's Printing Co-Op, May 1981). Courtesy of Adrienne Boyle Personal Archive

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government announced plans to introduce a work-sharing scheme in the face of rising unemployment. The scheme proposed to offer a subsidy of £750 to any employer that split an existing full-time job into two part-time positions and hired someone previously unemployed to fill at least one of them. An initial provision of £500,000 was made to fund splits, and the program was set to launch in January 1983.[101] A multitude of critics attacked the proposal as a blatant attempt to improve unemployment statistics without resolving the structural problems of the economy or guaranteeing British workers a living wage.[102] Nonetheless, talk of work sharing continued to circulate. For NWW, this posed a major problem; in practice, work sharing sounded a lot like job sharing.

While NWW continued to promote job sharing and to point out its key differences from work sharing—namely that it was voluntary and would deliver full employment benefits to part-time workers—the organization was nonetheless increasingly put on the defensive. This was likewise the case for the EOC, which had also been promoting job sharing since 1980. The EOC highlighted the role of job sharing in extending the benefits of full-time work into part-time employment rather than eroding workers' benefits across the board. The Conservative work-sharing scheme offered no guidance on the apportionment of contractual benefits, no proposed guarantees of benefits for employees working fewer than sixteen hours a week, and no commitment to maintaining the possibility of full-time positions should one job splitter resign from a post.[103]

The EOC sounded the alarm about this absence of safeguards. However intellectually compelling, efforts by NWW, the EOC, and other feminist bodies that favored job sharing to defend the concept proved a weak political strategy. Job sharing was at risk of being understood as a solution to unemployment and not as a visionary attempt to give women better-paid work options and remake the gendered division of labor. By introducing a broader vocabulary of flexible work in addition to continuing to promote job sharing, NWW ensured its survival. In the process, however, it turned further from its most radical visions of job sharing as a socializing solution to the alienated experience of work.

The Conservative government's response to rising unemployment prompted a new urgency in feminist discussions about women's paid work in the early 1980s. When childcare activists involved in the National Child Care Campaign debated the issue of part-time work in the pages of

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its newsletters in late 1981, the broader political-economic context was foremost on their minds. In October 1981, the socialist feminist Shirley Frost published a piece entitled "Women in Employment—Is Part-Time the Answer?" where she criticized the "hypocrisy of some middle class women" in suggesting that job sharing could be a solution for women broadly speaking, when in fact many women had no choice but to work full time to make ends meet.[104] Caroline Freeman, herself a socialist feminist, was quick to respond that "we should not demand more part-time work as it is now, but that does not mean people should be condemned for welcoming part-time work, shared childcare and housework, role swaps, job sharing and so on as solutions to their individual problems here and now. Ideas which are convenient to the government in a recession, because of their cheapness, may be valid in their own right."[105]

From the very outset, the members of the JSP had acknowledged the risk that their ideas might be co-opted and misdirected.[106] In a July 1980 meeting the group reiterated this concern, noting, "we shouldn't be naïve about job-sharing being used to cut unemployment and job sharing being seen as part of work sharing." However, they concluded they couldn't allow themselves to become "too bogged down in the issue" lest they "forget the positive example job sharing can be in part-time employment."[107] In 1980, the JSP wasn't yet prepared to rethink its approach.

The issue of what to do about the growing "convenience" of the idea of job sharing nonetheless continued to rear its head as a practical issue for NWW. Although it was not until the late 1980s that private sector employers began to introduce flexible work schemes—some of which included job sharing—on a widespread scale, from 1981, a growing number of commercial employers in Britain began to register interest. In November 1981, Walton and Boyle were invited to meet with Pedigree Pet Foods, a large employer in Melton Mowbray, to discuss job sharing. As had been the case on several previous occasions, it turned out that the company was interested in using job sharing only as a cutback measure. Walton and Boyle were conflicted. On the one hand, they concluded that Pedigree had excellent working conditions. It wanted to introduce job sharing to double the number of their employees working on a half-time basis "in order to get more off the dole queue." According to Walton and Boyle, "they stressed constantly the voluntary nature of the scheme. But in the end there are no replacements for jobs lost."[108]

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Walton and Boyle put a number of questions to their then colleagues at NWW, including "Where do we stand?" and "in practice if they approach us, do we 'advise' this kind of employer, or what do we do?" as well as "what is our position if suggested for high numbers of employees if it's a choice between half the workforce staying f/t and the other half being on the dole? Particularly if there is no possibility whatever of fighting the redundancies further?" The meeting with Pedigree Pet Foods was yet another impetus for reflection on the political juncture at hand. Walton and Boyle noted, "Hitherto we have taken the verbal position only that j/s cannot be an answer to unemployment. But could we be a positive force in this debate, by for example pressing for . . . the possibility of all the workforce being asked if they would like to go part-time . . . or is this too fraught with danger?" For the time being, NWW continued to address these questions on a case-by-case basis.

From 1981 onward, NWW came out repeatedly, and strongly, against work sharing—sometimes also described as job splitting. Ultimately this in and of itself did not prove adequate to distinguish its agenda from the new conservative platform.[109] The TUC also spoke out powerfully against job splitting, arguing that the government had intentionally sought to blur distinctions between its own agenda and the TUC's ongoing campaign for reduced working time. Activists were far less willing to put their necks on the line to defend job sharing from its association with the Conservative scheme.[110] The British media likewise contributed to blurring distinctions between job splitting and job sharing, albeit mostly unintentionally. In July 1982, a BBC Radio 4 broadcast on the work-sharing scheme inadvertently referred to the plan as job sharing and attacked it as a failure of the government to address unemployment.[111] Similarly, a 1984 broadcast on voluntary, feminist job-sharing schemes in Britain referred to the new mode of working as job splitting, clouding the two concepts.[112]

By 1983, the original message of job sharing had been significantly eroded in the face of new, negative publicity as well as plain confusion. Reflecting on their prospects for securing further GLC financial support for NWW in October 1981, Boyle could still conclude with some confidence that the GLC was likely to be regarded favorably because "the Tories don't like us."[113] By 1982, however, even that seemingly safe assumption no longer appeared to be a guarantee. In 1982, the Conservative MP for Northern Ireland Philip Goodhart paid a visit to the new NWW offices to seek

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guidance regarding job splitting. Walton recalls that she and her colleagues were none too happy about the visit.[114]

Amid the dilemmas posed by the shifting political-economic context, the activists of NWW discovered the seeds of a new strategy. By 1981, the organization had made some progress in supporting individuals and groups in particular sectors to arrange job shares.[115] Activism had made even greater strides in communicating the message that certain categories of workers—namely parents, caregivers, people with disabilities, those nearing retirement, and those with other major commitments and interests—needed more flexibility, including possibly less than full-time work. This demand, distanced by a degree from debates about part-time work and class, and from the political flashpoint of the Conservative Party's work-sharing scheme, was more readily received. The decision to assume the name New Ways to Work and to broaden the focus of the project's activism to include a wider range of "flexible work options" seemed the only logical way to reclaim a vision of remaking the gendered division of labor from an emerging Conservative agenda.

As the JSP became NWW, the gender politics of its activism also began to shift. NWW had insisted from its origins in 1977 that job sharing was aimed not only at enabling women with caring responsibilities to pursue satisfying paid work but also at transforming the gendered division of labor across the board. As a result, its members had emphasized the benefits of job sharing to both women with children and more generally to all workers who wanted or needed more time outside of paid labor. Over the course of the early 1980s, NWW saw growing interest from men as well as women in participating in job shares, and from this perspective, it began to make intellectual sense to speak about the value of flexibility for all workers. But by 1983, an emphasis on the needs of workers in general rather than working women in particular became politically expedient too.

NWW found it useful to frame the demand for flexibility in terms of the needs of male as much as female workers to push back against the trivialization of the flexible work agenda as simply a women's issue and therefore not a major concern for social policy.[116] As early as October 1981, in reflecting on the best strategy for ensuring the ongoing financial support of the notoriously feminist GLC, Boyle noted that "we should stress the employment aspect of our work, rather than the women aspect."[117] In other instances, it was less a conscious strategy on the part of NWW than a question of the

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degree to which the project emphasized the growth of men's participation in household and caring work.[118] In practice, then, the demand for "flexibility" came to be articulated through less exclusively feminist language in a changed political climate and in the quest for financial support. NWW continued to point out the need for time and space outside of paid work to take part in caring activities, but it did so increasingly at the expense of highlighting the unequal gendered division of this caring work.

Ultimately, the Conservative work-sharing scheme was a flop.[119] By March 1983, the government had approved only 149 applications for grants to split jobs despite having spent £338,500 in advertising the scheme.[120] In July 1983, the government conceded that the scheme had resulted in just 317 job splits in the first five months of the year.[121] A year later the scheme had still seen only 990 full-time jobs split, far short of the government's target of 25,000.[122] The scheme continued until March 1985, but it went nowhere. Although the issue of work sharing faded into the background, NWW's emergence out of the tensions of 1981 had lasting consequences.

At the same time as NWW shaped new strategies, it also began to develop more formal institutional practices that in turn saw its message gain a wider platform.[123] In embracing a broader agenda of flexible work, NWW did not abandon the concept of job sharing. It continued to highlight that job sharing had been "proved to work," though it was now noted that there was "no wish to add the new orthodoxy of job sharing to the old orthodoxy of full-time work" and emphasized that it was "urgent to develop further alternatives."[124] NWW also conceded that job sharing had left some workers "still out in to cold," namely those working-class and minority Britons who simply could not live on a half salary. By the time the work-sharing scheme no longer posed a political threat to NWW's platform of job sharing, it was a very different organization. This came to full fruition in 1984.

For the first time, in 1984, NWW wrote both a development plan and an annual report. The decision to do so was prompted by a range of factors including the challenges it faced in securing national funding, mounting concerns about the future of its office following the threatened abolition of the GLC, and "by a feeling among Management Committee members and London workers alike that the organisation as a whole was becoming too demand-led and needed the opportunity to reevaluate its dramatic growth so far and develop considered ideas as to its future direction."[125] In 1984, as had been the case seven years earlier, the stated aims of NWW remained to

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challenge the traditional male-breadwinner model of employment and to create equal opportunities for paid work.

The constancy of this demand, however, belied a tremendous shift in the organization's focus. On the one hand, NWW continued to articulate the need for different modes of working as a solution to the problem of discrimination. It also persisted in pointing out that changes in the structures of paid work were but one piece of what should be a broader program of welfare services and benefits, including better childcare facilities, to support the social needs of all Britons. On the other hand, NWW made clear, in a decisive change of tone, that it would now "explicitly state that new ways to work are for everyone, not just women."[126] Furthermore, NWW opened its doors, far less grudgingly this time, to a range of political actors and noted proudly in its 1984–1985 annual report that it had had "exploratory meetings with sympathetic MPs from all the main parties."[127] NWW's ongoing disappointment with unions and the need to secure its financial footing further propelled these shifts.

In 1984, NWW officially became a charity after several years of work in that direction. This new status afforded the project the possibility of access to funding from statutory sources such as the Department of Employment and the Department of Health and Social Security for the first time. As had been the case in the context of childcare activism, NWW's charitable status ushered in a new era for flexible work activism. The group continued to campaign as a lobbying organization both on behalf of specific individuals and for flexible models of work in general, but it also consolidated a new role as a service provider. Its 1984–1985 annual report documented "a noticeable increase in the numbers of London-based employers, unions and employment specialists seeking information, advice, speakers and other services from us."[128]

Moreover, NWW's reorientation around a model of service provision emerged both from the de facto realities of its work and from a desire to secure a financial basis for itself apart from the whim of funding bodies, particularly in the interest of expanding its hitherto unfunded national work. The 1984 development report set out plans to begin charging directly for services. Since 1983, NWW had charged a fee for those using its job-sharing register. Now it hoped to increase income from publications, to establish a membership organization and to charge nominal fees for membership, and, most significantly, to charge for services to employers and unions. By

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1984, NWW had been employed by at least one local authority on a consultancy basis to run training sessions and had earned £6,000 for its work.

NWW was, by the mid-1980s, in the business of advising on, implementing, and monitoring as much as advocating for policy changes. This was in large part a product of its successful inroads into particular employment sectors and into unions. In the face of declining membership overall, unions finally began to take more seriously the concerns of women members who dominated in expanding areas of employment. Whereas women had comprised 30 percent of total union membership in Britain in 1979, by 1992, this number had reached 42 percent. By the mid-1980s, unions began in earnest to pursue new strategies to recruit female workers, and increasingly over the course of the decade they considered how to operate in areas of insecure and precarious employment.[129] They consequently became more receptive than before to adding equal opportunities bargaining points to their agenda.[130]

The tradeoff for successful inroads into traditional organizations was that it became increasingly difficult for NWW to disentangle its aims and platforms from those with whom it worked. Although the organization's staff remained committed to remaking the gendered division of labor by reforming the conditions of paid work, its growing emphasis on flexibility for all workers in conversations with employers rendered subsidiary the original emphasis on the experiences of mothers and a corresponding collectivist image of "sharing" work. Over the first eight years of its history, NWW had evolved from a voluntary feminist project to a service-oriented charity positioned to lead developments in the new policy area of flexible work. By the time the GLC was abolished in March 1986, NWW had diversified its sources of funding and made possible, if in no way guaranteed, a future in a profoundly reshaped political-economic context.[131]

IV. CONCLUSION

In June 1987, the staff of NWW conducted a research study on couples who job shared. It gathered information from twenty-one couples, some of whom had been job sharing since as early as 1977, in everything from teaching and university lecturing to clinical psychology and retail management. Much like the early activists of the JSP, the individuals featured in the 1987 study had been motivated to pursue job shares foremost by a desire

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to combine paid work with childcare. Reflecting on her experience sharing a job as principal social worker in Sheffield City Council, Linda Gregory noted that she and her husband, John Randall, both enjoyed being home with their children and that job sharing had also enabled her to "keep a firm foothold in a career."[132] Moreover, she felt that job sharing had been profoundly beneficial to their children aged two and four: "We're very different, we do different things with the children—so they have difference experiences, different relationships, and I think it's been good for them and for us."

Numerous couples surveyed emphasized that job sharing had presented the opportunity to live out a different kind of day-to-day equality in their households. As one male job sharer put it, job sharing can "create an opportunity to attempt total equality in marriage: a kind of family life without sex defined roles at home or at work." Much as the original members of the JSP had hoped it would, job sharing allowed some British families to realize new ideals of partnership in both marriage and parenting.

While all of the couples surveyed by NWW in 1987 had first begun job sharing as a way to divide parenting responsibilities, many reported that it had contributed to a more "balanced way of life" in the long term. Some told the organization that they had continued to job share even once their children grew older as it afforded them time to pursue other interests and activities. The couples surveyed were evidently proud of their arrangements and expressed a strong desire to model their lives and approach to professional and family life for others—above all, to demonstrate that satisfying ways of balancing work and family life were indeed possible. While the vast majority of the couples featured in NWW's published study enthused about their experiences job sharing, they did not hesitate to highlight its challenges. Some couples reported facing stigma either at work or in their communities. This was particularly the case for men, whose decisions to job share to participate more fully in childrearing were sometimes perceived as reflecting a lack of ambition. But foremost among the challenges reported by job sharers in the late 1980s was the issue of salary. For Gregory and Randall, sharing in the long term was simply not an option "because of money." NWW acknowledged that for many families, job sharing was not possible.

NWW's 1987 study reflected the charity's ongoing commitment to promoting job sharing as a way of encouraging a transformation in the

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gendered division of labor as well as equal opportunities in paid work. In choosing to highlight the experience of couples who job shared—admittedly a very small minority of Britons—NWW drew attention to the values that had since the very outset motivated its work. NWW described couples who job shared as exemplifying a "modern approach to work and parenthood" and embodying new ideals of partnership and equality.[133] But in choosing to highlight the experiences of job-sharing couples, NWW also betrayed a shift in its focus. The study surveyed and then described the experience of "couples" and of "parents"; it had far less to say about women as such. By writing about the experiences of couples and of working parents, NWW pursued the radical goal of normalizing the fact that growing numbers of men expressed the desire to participate actively in childcare. In the process, however, it obscured the ongoing differences in men's and women's experiences both in paid work and in households.[134]

Moreover, while NWW noted that in families where both parents worked "it was necessary to employ others for childcare, and often for domestic work" and indicated repeatedly that men wished to share childcare, it had much less to say about how other kinds of household labor were divided in job-sharing couples. Nor, despite their recognition of the economic privilege inherent in being able to share a job, did it address the fact that it was working-class and ethnic minority women with families of their own who most often provided the support necessary when households outsourced domestic work.[135] As had long been the case, NWW had little to offer to address the unique challenges confronting nonwhite Britons.

NWW was not alone in introducing a conversation about "working parenthood" into popular currency in the 1980s. However, its history shaped the contradictions that became inscribed in the meaning of working parenthood as it emerged as a new category of political mobilization and identity. As it traveled from its origins in the WLM, and into dialogue with unions, employers, and individual workers, the notion of working parenthood became closely associated with the concerns of predominately white middle-class Britons. The history of NWW is closely bound up with the early history of working parenthood in part because it was, throughout the organization's history, individuals with primary childcare responsibilities in families who most frequently reached out for support. The vast majority of job sharers were, and continue to be, mothers. But although the JSP emerged out of the needs of a group of mothers, its original aim was never

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to link the demand for alternatives to the forty-hour 9-to-5 work week exclusively to the needs of parents. Instead, it imagined a range of social, political, and creative activities that gave meaning to life outside of work. The initial members of the JSP had at most a mixed investment in the language of working parenthood that by the mid-1980s began to displace its earlier emphasis on women's inclusion, self-realization, and role in transforming communities.[136]

By 1987, tensions in the gendered object of NWW's activism had only been magnified as the organization sought to assert its relevance on a political-economic terrain less hospitable to overt demands for women's rights. At the same time, tensions of class that had existed from the outset in NWW's activism remained unresolved. To the extent that NWW had made headway in practice, it was primarily in reforming particular areas of professional white-collar work. Despite the organization's acknowledgment by 1984 that job sharing could not be a solution to the problems of reconciling paid work with caring responsibilities for workers in all job categories, tensions of class and race persisted. For working-class and minority Britons employed in low-wage shift work, the new category of flexibility offered little that job sharing did not—it was simply far from the most pressing labor concern. Furthermore, much as unions had long feared, the notion of flexibility that NWW embraced under political pressure from the early 1980s was none too distant from the new ideas about flexitime that had begun to appear genial to some British employers as early as the mid-1970s. As much as job sharing before it, flexibility proved difficult to parse from the interests of employers and a state bent on extracting ever more value from British workers.[137]

If the language of flexibility as well as the growing emphasis on working parents seeking solutions reflected the difficult compromises of feminist activists, they also enabled activists to continue to tailor their message to contemporary debates while avoiding political minefields. In linking the demand for flexible work options to the needs of couples and of working parents, NWW appealed to its ongoing need for publicity as much as funding, as the national press seized on examples of job-sharing couples, househusbands, and dual-income households—all distinctly middle-class formations—to expound on the transformation of gender roles in Britain postwomen's liberation and on its consequences for families. The language of working parenthood allowed NWW to assert a harmony between the

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needs and desires of women and men and to hint at the demands of life outside of paid work, including under new economic conditions, without focusing on discord.

Through a variety of rhetorical and practical strategies, by the mid-1980s, NWW had succeeded in seeing flexible work recognized as an issue of social policy, in helping a range of individuals negotiate better day-to-day work arrangements, and in instituting policies and procedures to govern flexible work in a number of professional areas.[138] In 1985, a mother of small children with professional qualifications and the desire or need to remain in paid work had a better chance of doing so than had been the case just eight years previously. In addition to a host of new published research available to demonstrate the feasibility and value of flexible work arrangements, she had at her disposal an identifiable national and indeed international network of potential advocates. In other words, she had at her disposal what Boyle and Walton had not when they were forced out of their professional fields less than ten years earlier.

It was not until 1992 that NWW would declare that "in 1980 no company boardroom would consider flexible working arrangements except at a junior level. We have now seen all this turned on its head." But by the mid-1980s, the seeds of this transformation had been sown.[139] In other ways, too, the activism inaugurated by the WLM had enduring legacies. NWW failed to revolutionize the gendered division of labor or to transform working life for all women. However, its activism promoted what would prove to be an enduring utopianism about the possibilities of remaking intimate life through changes in work practice despite mounting evidence to the contrary.

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3 FROM EQUALITY TO DIVERSITY: WORKING PARENTS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

In the winter of 1990, Oxfordshire County Council became the first recipient of a new prize from the Working Mothers Association (WMA) for Britain's Employer of the Year. The WMA, a charity with feminist roots, first came up with the idea for an annual award to recognize employers that had adopted policies favorable to working parents alongside awards for Working Mother of the Year and Working Mother's Helper of the Year.[1] According to the WMA, Oxfordshire offered "an impressive range of benefits, including nursery and afterschool care for some of its employees, flexible working arrangements and job shares, generous maternity leave, and above all, parental leave which recognised the role of fathers."[2] In addition, the council was applauded for providing employees with a childcare information booklet, and a liaison officer whose role was to work with other local employers to develop childcare provision in the county.

In its application packet for the prize, Oxfordshire noted that "many of our 'parent-friendly' policies were in place before such things became fashionable, and will continue even if they become unfashionable again." Furthermore, they emphasized "all our provisions apply to manual employees as well as to white collar and professional staff."[3] A year later, Hilary Simpson, Oxfordshire County Council's personnel officer for recruitment and equal opportunities, wrote to the WMA to report that "winning the award has been wonderful publicity for us."[4] She also expressed her hope that the recognition afforded by the award would continue to spur efforts on the part of the council toward building a "family-friendly" workplace.

When announcing Oxfordshire's win in the WMA's quarterly newsletter, Lucy Daniels—director of the WMA—paused to reflect on the status of

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family-friendly employment in Britain in 1990. She painted a mixed picture. Daniels reported that while "media coverage suggests that childcare is the employee perk of the 90s, and women returners the most prized possession on a personnel department's payroll," this was far from a widespread reality. According to Daniels, "the actual effect on women's working lives is minimal." She went on to say that benefits for working parents were more developed in the public than in the private sector and issued a challenge to commercial employers to keep pace. While reinforcing Oxfordshire's claim that they were in many ways unique among British employers, Daniels nonetheless concluded on a positive note. She emphasized that the dozens of entrants to the competition had evidenced "innovative examples of employers who have truly striven to improve benefits to working parents."[5]

The WMA hosted its Employer of the Year award again the following year.[6] In 1991, they received around sixty competition entries from across public and private sectors—ranging from the Leicester City Council and the North West Thames Health Authority to the insurance company Allied Dunbar and the pharmacy chain Boots. A commercial employer—American Express Europe—took the top prize that year.[7] In 1992, the charity again received over fifty submissions and for the first time awarded prizes in multiple categories: public sector employer, large private sector employer, and small private sector employer.[8] As the volume and nature of submissions evolved over the course of the 1990s, so too did the award categories. In 1995, the WMA—which had since taken the name Parents at Work (PAW)—sponsored awards for large, medium, and small employers without regard to sector and for relative newcomers to family-friendly policy.[9] The adoption of the award categories enabled PAW to communicate to employers that their status as a particular kind of organization need not be a barrier to supporting working parents.[10]

During the 1990s, a number of private organizations sponsored the employer award and a reception to honor recipients. In this context, charitable giving itself became a potential indicator of the family-friendly status of donor organizations. The WMA encouraged further employer engagement in the competitions by offering individuals representing different sectors and industries the chance to serve on the annual panel of judges. The lure of positive publicity drew employers to participate. In 1994, the Driving and Vehicle Licensing Agency received front-page coverage in *The Times* after winning the WMA's employer award.[11] By the mid-1990s, "family

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friendliness" had emerged as a newsworthy marker of organizational status. The working parent had indeed become "fashionable."

The two years between 1989 and 1991 were a watershed moment in the history of the working parent in Britain. It was in the late 1980s and early 1990s that a prominent group of British employers began, for the first time, to compete for the loyalty of their employees and, in some cases, customers based on their alleged family friendliness. Whether or not an organization offered family-friendly policies also became a means by which prospective employees could evaluate potential employers. The WMA's award competitions were just one of several indicators of change in employment practice in the early 1990s. In 1991, the British corporate social responsibility charity Business in the Community introduced a campaign entitled "Opportunity 2000," which encouraged competition, as well as collaboration, among employers to "maximize the potential of women in the workforce."[12] During the 1990s, the growing numbers of employers who signed on to Opportunity 2000 committed to increasing the representation of women in management and to keeping mothers in paid work.[13] While some changes in employment policy and practice affected the working lives of only a tiny minority of Britons in this period, others—such as mounting pressure to expand maternity and paternity leave provision—had significantly more widespread and enduring consequences.

As important as the adoption of new policies in the early 1990s was the role played by employers in reshaping a national conversation about the lives and responsibilities of workers outside of paid work. By 1991, public and private sector employers, charities, and the media alike spoke routinely about the interests and needs of women in the workforce, of working mothers, and of working parents—often interchangeably. The ideal of family friendliness, increasingly evoked during the 1990s, rested on assumptions about the personal as much as the professional lives of workers and referenced an imagined worker no less shaped by assumptions of gender, class, and race than the white male breadwinner before her. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a conversation about working parents had first emerged from feminist campaigns aimed at drawing attention to the unique challenges faced by workers with caring responsibilities. Feminists had also sought to rethink the nature and structures of paid work more generally. Over the course of the 1980s, this conversation migrated into the media, the charitable sector, and local government. In each context it was modified and

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put to new use. The ways in which employers came to talk about "working parents"—first in the public sector and by the late 1980s in the private sector as well—profoundly altered the politics of the "working parent" from its feminist roots.

The two chapters that follow ask what motivated some employers to introduce family-friendly policies on behalf of the needs of working parents during the 1980s and early 1990s. They explore how these issues of employment policy were articulated—whether as concerns of equality or of diversity, as considerations of the recruitment and retention of women, or as forms of support for highly skilled women or for families. They also consider the degree to which the changes in employment practices in some organizations by the 1990s affected the lived experiences of British mothers and fathers. Finally, they ask to what extent the aims of feminist activists, including those who founded the NCCC, the JSP, and later the WMA, were realized in the figure of the working parent that came to cultural prominence in the 1990s.

The rise of the working parent in Britain was shaped actively by transformations in Britain's political economy. In the early 1980s, activists for job sharing, other forms of flexible work, and childcare had encountered as much employer resistance as support. In the context of high unemployment, few commercial employers had found an incentive to encourage mothers' participation in paid work. In these years, it was primarily public sector employers who pioneered policies to support working women and working parents.[14] The public sector in Britain grew substantially in the postwar years with the expansion of the welfare state. This was particularly true of the health and education sectors.[15] By 1979, women constituted more than half of the total public sector workforce.[16] The centrality of women workers in the state by the late 1970s encouraged an earlier engagement with the needs of working parents in the public sector.

Among public sector employers, it was notably local councils that initiated the first flexible work and employee childcare schemes in postwar Britain. The Conservative Party's victory in national elections in 1979 prompted a reinvigoration of local politics. In the early 1980s feminists and the extraparliamentary left more broadly entered local government in the hopes of delivering on the promises of 1970s activism. At the same time, progressive local councils such as the London Borough of Camden reiterated the demands of feminist activists in asserting the need for wide-ranging

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policies to eradicate inequalities. Motivated by ideals of antidiscrimination and equality, these councils set out to revise employment practices as part of a broader project of transforming local communities.[17]

The heyday of equal opportunities in local government nonetheless proved both limited in its scope and short lived. Soon, an altogether different set of political-economic forces reshaped public sector practice and encouraged a growing number of commercial employers to engage with the needs of working parents. In the late 1980s, the British labor market began to tighten, and commercial employers gained a new incentive to develop policies aimed at recruiting and retaining women amid concerns about declining numbers of school leavers. Research conducted by the Institute for Employment Research at Warwick University in 1988 forecasted that the number of young people entering the labor market between 1990 and 1995 was likely to fall by 25 percent—a loss of approximately one million workers. At the same time, the number of women entering the labor market was predicted to grow. Women were deemed likely to account for 80 percent of an anticipated million new workers, and mothers were to become the largest group among new entrants to the workforce. Employers took note.[18] That this demographic forecast promulgated by research institutes, the government, and in the media in the late 1980s was routinely referred to as the "demographic time bomb" captures something of the contemporary anxiety about the shifting gendered composition of the labor market.

At the same time as these broader demographic shifts got underway, British employers confronted new skills shortages—particularly at the managerial and professional level—as Britain transitioned to what contemporaries described as "a knowledge economy."[19] The impending prospect of a European single market from 1993 only fed employers' concerns about competing for labor in the future. Together, these factors spurred the development of a new "business case" for supporting equal opportunities in the late 1980s. As the business case for equal opportunities addressed itself to the needs of workers, however, it did so in a manner circumscribed from the radical aims of feminists a decade and a half earlier.

The multiple transformations of Britain's political economy in the 1980s took place within a global context. The feminist activists who had campaigned for changes in the culture of paid work and for resources for working parents in the late 1970s and early 1980s looked to government and

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employer policy in both Europe and the United States as a model. Over the course of the 1980s, however, British activists and employers alike turned increasingly to the United States as the prime exemplar of modern employment practice. In discussions among activists, public and private sector employers, and the media, the US was routinely referenced as a mirror—often good, sometimes concerning—for developments current and anticipated in Britain. In shaping new types of workplaces for some categories of workers, employers evoked notions of family friendliness and work–life balance that tied British commercial practice to an emerging global model of white-collar work. If the interests of British and American business grew cozier in this period, so too did the interests of British charities, businesses, and local and national government. In the turn toward American-inspired answers to the problem posed by working parents, activists, the state, and businesses alike increasingly embraced private over public solutions. To understand the institutional consensus that took shape around the working parent by the 1990s, we must first consider the alternative vision of support for working parents that briefly flourished as part of an equal opportunities policy framework in the public sector.

I. WITHOUT PREJUDICE: SHAPING A VISION OF EQUALITY AT WORK AND IN THE COMMUNITY

In August 1984, the London Borough of Camden released a pamphlet entitled "Without Prejudice"—a guide to Camden Council's equal opportunities policy for current and prospective employees (figure 3.1).[20] According to the council, "today it is accepted that the colour of your skin, your sex, your sexuality or any disability will affect your job chances. . . . There is legislation to prevent some types of discrimination, but it is not enough to bring about change. Camden Council's Equal Opportunities Policy aims to eradicate these inequalities so that all workers have the same chance."

The pamphlet went on to outline Camden's commitment to being "more thorough than the law in preventing discrimination" through a range of measures developed since the late 1970s. These included opportunities for job sharing, education courses, racism awareness training, paid time off to care for sick dependents, and affirmative action courses designed to increase the recruitment of minorities into higher-paying job categories in the council. It also included policies aimed at specific groups deemed to have special

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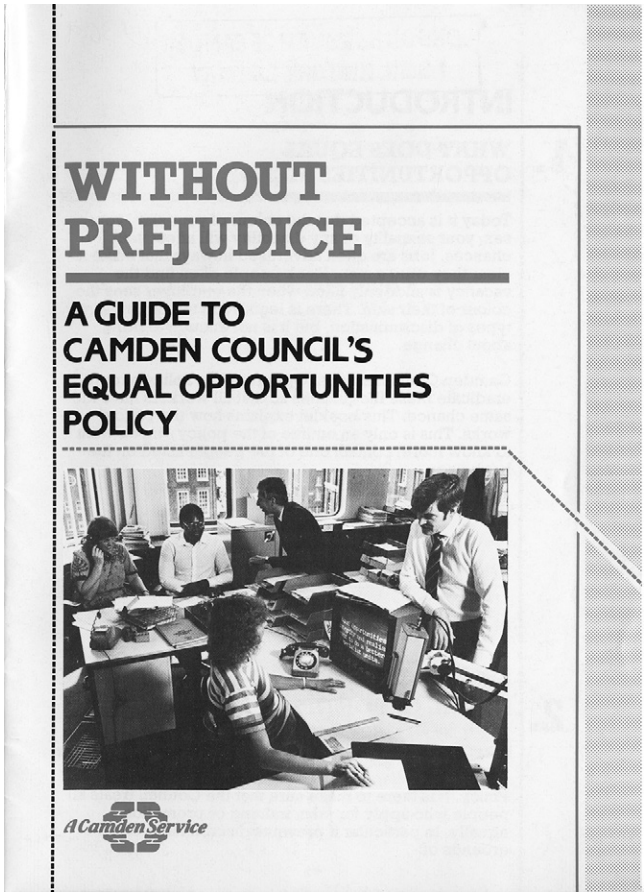

FIGURE 3.1
Without Prejudice. Courtesy of Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre.

needs in the workplace, namely parents, women, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, sexual minorities, and people with unrelated or "spent" criminal convictions. By 1984, Camden Council had instituted some of the most progressive employment policies on behalf of both working women and working parents of any employer in Britain.

The equal opportunities policies developed in Camden in the late 1970s and early 1980s are representative of a broader trend that emerged among a subset of Labour councils—particularly, though not exclusively, within Greater London and other metropolitan districts—in this period. From

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1979 onward, the Labour left in Britain looked increasingly toward local government as the scope for political action at the national scale narrowed under Margaret Thatcher. A new municipal feminism also emerged in the early 1980s as activists from the women's liberation movement (WLM) and the left more broadly participated in local government in the hopes of using the local state to novel ends.[21] As we have seen, beginning in 1981, the leadership of Ken Livingstone at the Greater London Council (GLC) and its well-funded women's committee under Valerie Wise ensured financial support for equalities initiatives on a new scale in London.[22]

In the early 1980s, borough women's committees were formed throughout the capital as well as in cities such as Aberdeen, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Leeds, Newcastle, and Nottingham.[23] The engagement of these committees with issues of women's equality and representation were critical in seeing the concerns of working parents highlighted by women's movement activists transformed into an agenda for local government.[24] Equally important was the role of unions such as the National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO), where feminists had also made inroads into the leadership of local branches and demanded that attention be paid to issues including part-time work, low pay and low status jobs, child and eldercare, and workplace bullying and sexual harassment.[25]

While Camden's equal opportunities policies are therefore representative of a new attention to the needs of women workers and working parents that developed in several metropolitan councils in the early 1980s, the uptake of equalities agendas within local government nonetheless varied dramatically in this period. Even in notably left-wing councils, there were major differences in policy that reflected the nature of local constituencies and the relative character and strength of trade unions in different parts of the country.

In Sheffield, for instance, despite acknowledging the centrality of women's paid work to the economic well-being of the city as early as 1983, the Labour council under David Blunkett did not set up a unit to consider women's issues until 1986. As Daisy Payling's work has highlighted, Sheffield City Council emphasized the issue of unemployment rather than drawing attention to issues of labor market inequality and gender discrimination, although over the course of the 1980s, some scope emerged for addressing workplace harassment and implementing training initiatives for women staff.[26] The trade unionist background of Sheffield's councillors shaped

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the council's focus on class issues and its reluctance to highlight women's unique concerns as workers, and it reflected the traditionalist orientation of the influential local unions. Issues such as childcare were perceived in Sheffield City Council in the early 1980s as essentially middle class and far from the pressing concerns of "ordinary" women.[27] In short, the emergence of a new equalities agenda in local government in Britain in the early 1980s was patchy and varied in nature; few councils were as active as Camden in these years in reformulating policy around a new political agenda of equality of opportunity.[28]

It is precisely the new political agenda that Camden brought to reshaping employment practices in the early 1980s that renders it worth considering in detail. The unique episode of feminist innovation in employment policy within local government in the early 1980s sheds light on a decisive moment of shift in the making of the neoliberal working parent. The job-sharing policy, childcare provision, and training initiatives developed in Camden in the early 1980s at the behest of councilors, staff, and trade unionists reflected the vision of feminist activists determined to see employers accommodate the needs of workers of both sexes with caring responsibilities. These policies sought to address the concerns of women in the workplace. Equally, by emphasizing the needs of parents, they took aim at the gendered division of labor in the realms of both work and home.

In an article published in the Camden NALGO branch magazine in October 1982, Pam Lawrence, an employee in the Social Services department, articulated this twofold vision: "I hope that we will begin pushing men into an active acceptance of the idea that being a father means the same as being a mother in terms of both work and domestic responsibility. . . . I hope that women will help each other not to undertake the lion's share of home and childcare. I hope that the unions will decide that every job at every level should be opened to part timers so that parents can take equal shares."[29] In the early 1980s, Camden Council sought to make this vision a reality.

However, the policies devised to do so were only ever partially successful in practice. Progressive schemes, once instituted, were unevenly used. They were also unevenly applied and were repeatedly undermined by tenuous financial commitment, reproducing inequalities along lines of gender, class, and race. By the late 1980s, flagging policies that were intended to support equalities were retooled altogether under new managerial regimes

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designed to deliver cost savings and render local government employers more competitive in the changing labor market. Whereas a large degree of consensus prevailed among Camden Council and its workers over the direction of the borough in the early 1980s—despite some points of contention—a decade later the council was increasingly in conflict with its staff. The failure of equalities policies to deliver on the promise of opportunity for all workers points to the ways in which feminist strategy faltered in the sphere of policy making.

II. THE STRUGGLE TO BUILD A MORE EQUAL CAMDEN

Camden Council began to engage actively with the challenges confronting working parents in the late 1970s in response to mounting pressure from its staff. In 1975, amid the women's movements' calls for increased childcare provision, Camden's NALGO branch formed an Equal Rights Working Party, and the group began to campaign for a workplace nursery.[30] The union working party had been established to address women's rights concerns, and this soon encompassed the needs of parents. In 1975, in the pages of its branch magazine *Public Eye*, Camden NALGO reported on the need for "facilities for parents at work," including a staff crèche and paid leave for parents looking after sick children.[31] The union emphasized the council's dependence on women employees, who comprised the majority of lower-paid staff and often had childcare responsibilities.[32] They also drew attention to the potential costs to the council of failing to retain women workers and of lost work hours as staff struggled to meet caring demands outside of work.[33]

The initial group that came together through NALGO to campaign for a staff nursery in 1975 seems to have been comprised primarily by women workers on high pay grades in the council, largely from the Housing and Social Services Department. By 1977, the group had expanded from this base to include a larger percentage of women in lower pay grades, including typists and residential workers.[34] While women staff were instrumental in putting the issue of childcare on the agenda of the local NALGO branch and ultimately the council, men were also involved in the effort. The campaigners were sure to emphasize that the issue of childcare "does not affect only the women" and that nurseries weren't "purely an issue for those 'women's libbers.'"[35] Over the course of the late 70s, the nursery

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campaign addressed itself increasingly to the needs of parents generally and highlighted the issue of equality for all workers, even while it remained focused on the particular challenges confronting women staff.[36] This dual emphasis reflected feminists' dual aims of improving the status of women in work and of shifting the gendered division of labor.

When NALGO first entered into official negotiations with the council over a proposed nursery in the late 1970s, the idea was met with ready sympathy from numerous councilors. It ran into trouble, however, over issues of funding and a potential facility when it reached the Staff Management and Services Committee.[37] The union persisted in raising its demand for provision, and by early 1977, a council working group including representatives from the chief executive's office, social services, council architects, NALGO, and National Union of Public Employees had been set up. The group conducted a provisional estimate of costs for establishing a staff nursery and considered issues of demand, staffing, and opening hours.[38]

After years of campaigning, in February 1978, Camden became the first local authority in postwar Britain to provide childcare for employees when it offered staff-subsidized nursery places at the Kingsway Children's Centre.[39] It was not until March 1978 that the council approved plans for a purpose-built workplace nursery close to town hall, and the new Hampden Centre nursery opened in November 1980.[40] It was initially funded to accommodate twenty-five children, and from the outset, it met with heavy demand. Nursery fees were charged to staff according to their pay grade, though staff members were entitled to apply for a reduction of fees.[41] According to an article applauding the long-awaited opening of the nursery in the Camden NALGO magazine, the nursery and its staff reflected an understanding of the "particular needs of working parents."[42]

It was likewise in 1978 that Camden Council first adopted an equal opportunities in employment policy.[43] Subsequently, the council conceived of the staff nursery as one several equalities schemes aimed at supporting the needs of both women employees and working parents. Between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, Camden also significantly increased its parental leave provision, which included pay that far exceeded the required legal minimum. While in 1974, women employees of the council were entitled to eighteen weeks maternity leave with full pay for the first four weeks, by 1984, women were allowed a total of forty weeks leave with sixteen weeks full pay and twenty-four weeks half pay. This extension followed from the

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introduction of an official maternity leave scheme in 1978 intended to enable women to "return to work if they wished to do so."[44] In 1980, the aims of the scheme were broadened further in consultation with NALGO to "prepare expectant mothers for a change in their life, support them after childbirth, reduce the problems of reentry into work and identify opportunities for work and childcare sharing."[45] In 1984, the council launched a formal counseling service for maternity leave returners with the aim of ensuring that employees were aware of the availability of childcare facilities and other policies in support of working parents.[46]

While the council and its staff alike largely assumed that working mothers would be the primary caregivers for young children in these years, Camden also took steps to acknowledge and facilitate men's participation in childcare. At the same time as the council introduced an official maternity leave scheme in 1978, it also instituted five days of paid paternity leave for all staff. In their negotiating kit for working parents published the following year, NALGO's national organization held up Camden's paternity policy as indicative of one of the best public sector agreements in support of working parents in the country.[47] In the early 1980s, Camden's NALGO branch pushed for further extensions to the paternity leave policy. In a March 1983 piece in *Public Eye*, Howard Stacey, from the council's social services department, wrote that five days was "scarcely long enough to see the baby out of the hospital!" and that "the position created by this level of leave provision falls on the child's mother from very early days." He proposed a month of paid paternity leave for men and greater encouragement for men to job share so that there was real hope of shifting the gendered division of labor.[48] While it would be decades before paternity schemes on the scale that Stacey imagined would come into effect in Britain, by 1984, Camden had extended paid paternity leave for staff to ten days.[49] It had also introduced further paid time off for employees of either sex who were responsible for the care of sick dependents.

In addition, in 1982 Camden was one of the first London boroughs to institute an official job-sharing policy open to all staff members regardless of job category.[50] The council maintained a job-sharing register to assist staff in finding job-sharing partners, and it instituted a biannual review of the scheme to track the demographic profile of workers job sharing within the council.[51] Although the majority of job sharers from the early 1980s onward were women, and almost entirely people working in nonmanual

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roles, the council maintained the hope of encouraging use by a range of staff.[52] Job sharing and the flexibility it afforded were framed as part of a strategy to "get the best from our employees" and to allow employees to "get the best from us."[53] Implicit in the council's commitment to job sharing and to subsequent training schemes adopted for women and minority workers was a vision, strongly in keeping with the feminist aims of the JSP, to making jobs work for employees as well as for employers.

Camden's job-sharing policy, parental leave provision, and staff nursery were envisioned by councillors and staff unions alike as mechanisms that would actively reduce sex discrimination and promote equality, improving work to the benefit of all.[54] The potential of these policies to shift the gendered division of labor—both to see women rise to positions of authority within the council and to see men take a greater share of domestic and caring responsibilities—also underscored the council's vision. Women and parents were regarded independently as two of the several groups requiring particular support in the workplace within a broader commitment to equality of opportunity.

The council's equalities policies were framed as innovations in keeping with the its growing commitment to equality of opportunity in the borough community as a whole. Camden's women's committee, first instituted in 1982, was responsible for considering council policies relating to women staff and to women in the borough community more generally.[55] On its formation immediately following the May election of a new Labour administration, the committee weighed in on all relevant party manifesto proposals affecting women—including issues of nursery and playgroup provision in the borough, support for local childminders, housing provision, and training and benefits for council staff.[56] The council's efforts to consolidate staff nursery provision in the early 1980s were components of a broader commitment to robust day nursery provision in the borough.[57]

Employment policy within the council was likewise shaped in this context as part and parcel of an inclusive political vision for the locality. As much as it increasingly fashioned its own internal practice, Camden sought to convey its integrated vision to the public. In a guide to council services published in 1981, the council noted that "it is important for people who live and work in Camden to know that the council is also a good employer."[58] The borough acknowledged that "as with many other inner London areas, Camden has suffered from a decline in industrial activity"

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and sought to position itself as a visible model for how to shape new kinds of possibilities amid the economic change wrought by deindustrialization.[59]

As an employer of more than seven thousand staff, the council was the largest in the borough.[60] Given the scope of Camden's personnel policies in this period, the council's aspiration to reshape employment in the community was nothing short of radical. In an interview in September 1983, Kate Allen, the chair of the new women's committee, indicated that "in terms of employment I feel we are going a bit deeper than people at first realised. It's not just about making sure that people can job share if they want to, it's about changing the expectations of the Council as employers and about making Camden as an employer aware of what women have to offer." The equalities policies introduced in Camden in the early 1980s were intended to not only shift the place of women in the workforce and beyond but also reconfigure the relationship between employer and employees across the borough community.

III. EQUALITY UNDER THREAT

If the vision underscoring Camden's equal opportunities schemes was a far-reaching one, the realities of devising new policies and implementing services in a period of dwindling financial resources and narrowing political scope for action were limiting in practice. In the early 1980s, the London Borough of Camden became a central battleground in the conflicts over public spending that raged between national and local government in Britain. Throughout the 1970s, Camden had been a progressive borough with a high spending record.[61] The Conservative victory in the 1979 national election and the party's determination to curb the activity of Labour local government put Camden under new strain. From midway through the 1979–1980 financial year, Thatcher's government called for cuts in local government spending and at the same time slashed central grants to local councils. In the short term, Camden, and most other Labour councils, simply increased local rates and continued their policies of high spending. Over time, however, reality caught up with the borough. In the face of reduced or altogether absent grants from central government, Camden steered a middle course of both increasing rates and implementing spending cuts in the early 1980s.[62]

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This pattern continued under the new rate-capping system introduced by the central government from 1985. Whereas councils had long had the authority to set local rates, this power was now assumed by the national government. In July 1984, Camden was singled out as one of eighteen local councils—sixteen of them Labour controlled—deemed to be overspending under the new rules. In response, Camden initially refused to set a rate and began the 1985 fiscal year without a budget, before eventually passing one amid political wrangling. The council was rate capped again the following year. By the late 1980s, the rate-capping system had placed Camden's agenda under mounting financial strain and had required multiple waves of cuts and organizational restructuring.[63] This financial and political backdrop set the stage for the unraveling of Camden's progressive employment policies no sooner than they were introduced.

In some instances, limitations in the reach of Camden's new policies due to financial constraints were evident from the get-go. When it was first opened in the winter of 1980, the long-anticipated Hampden Centre nursery was staffed from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. The Camden NALGO branch lost no time in pointing out that "if those working shifts—for example, manual workers and library staff—are to be accommodated, these hours are inadequate" and expressed the hope that "once the nursery is firmly established it will be possible to expand in terms of numbers and the hours of opening."[64] From the outset, the council's Staff and Management Services Committee had likewise acknowledged the need for longer hours to accommodate the needs of manual and shift workers.[65] In September 1982, nearly two years after it was first opened, Camden's women's committee was finally able to approve recommendations for renovations and additional staffing to increase the nursery's hours from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and to provide spots for an additional fifteen children at a net cost to the council of £67,000.[66] Nonetheless, the waiting list for the nursery continued to grow. By 1982, the council understood, as NALGO had anticipated, that manual workers "do not on the whole even make application to use the staff day nursery."[67] Within a mere two years, reality was struggling to keep pace with the council's vision of the nursery as a touchstone of its policy on equality.

By the mid-1980s, the obstacles confronting the council's vision for staff childcare support only deepened under pressure from policy change at the national level. In March 1984 Inland Revenue threatened to begin taxing

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employees on employer contributions toward workplace nurseries for the first time. Despite the tiny number of workplace nurseries in Britain and the widespread belief that these contributions were exempted, workplace nurseries were theoretically taxable before 1984. Following from the Inland Revenue's threats, Labour MPs introduced a bill to officially exempt nursery contributions from tax, but the bill failed resoundingly—rendering workplace nurseries de facto taxable. Labour MPs railed against the newly implemented tax as indicative of Thatcher's agenda of forcing women back into the home and pointed out the extraordinary inconsistency of the policy with other exemptions in place for workplace benefits such as canteens and parking spots. Meanwhile, workplace nurseries such as Camden's and those who used them were left struggling to cope.

In response to the new tax, in April 1985, following pressure from NALGO, Camden dropped nursery fees in an effort to protect the staff nursery while also lobbying government along with other employers to have the tax abolished.[68] However, just three years later in 1988, due to growing financial constraints, the council reintroduced a flat rate fee of £5 per family per week to limit cutbacks in nursery services.[69] By that point, the restructuring of the council following the abolition of the GLC in 1986 had already resulted in reduced nursery services.[70] A recruitment freeze from July 1987 left the nursery further understaffed, with only thirty-two full-time nursery places available despite ever-increasing demand. In January 1988, staffing levels fell so low that the council reported, "Should any staff become sick, take up annual leave, or take up training, full cover . . . would become immediately jeopardised and children/ babies would have to be sent home."[71] Meanwhile, by March 1988, there were approximately 250 children on the nursery waiting list.[72] For extended periods in the late 1980s, nursery hours were restricted to the point where parents were unable to work full days and were forced to resort to "dependency leave and the goodwill of their managers." As a result, increasingly restrictive opening hours had the additional effect of "maintaining a largely white, higher graded, non-manual profile of parents using the nursery" that only exacerbated the existing disparities in uptake of the council's childcare provision.[73]

Into the late 1980s Camden Council continued nevertheless to promote support for both women workers and working parents within its equalities framework. Despite its darkening future, the council continued to emphasize the importance of the staff nursery in the late 1980s and sought to

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redress inequalities in access that had long been a concern of councilors, the council's committees, and its staff. In March 1988, a report from the director of personnel and management services to the council's women's committee noted that "the workplace nursery is the centrepiece of any work-related system of childcare. It is a concrete statement of Camden's equal opportunities policy and a practical help in implementing its targeting policy. It is often the only chance some working parents have of finding reliable, secure, good quality collective childcare for their children."[74] That same year, the council instituted a change in the nursery's admissions policy in an attempt to improve the representation of children of low-paid workers. While cuts to services continued between 1988 and 1990, the council nonetheless succeeded in shifting the population of the nursery to better reflect the council's workforce. By 1990, there were greater numbers of manual workers, low-paid officers, and black workers using the nursery than had previously been the case.[75]

In the early 1990s, the council's ongoing financial crisis meant that the staff nursery was never successful in meeting demand and never became fully representative of the demographic profile of council employees. The constraints that had shaped both the possibilities and limitations of the staff nursery in the 1980s only deepened. In April 1990, John Major, as the newly appointed chancellor of the exchequer, abolished the workplace nursery tax first introduced in 1984. As late as 1989, Conservative MPs had argued in favor of maintaining the workplace nursery tax, but by 1990, the tides of opinion had shifted. As British and multinational corporations in the United Kingdom embraced the need for women workers in response to new pressures on the labor market, it was no longer politically salient to be seen as posing a barrier to women's workforce participation.[76] By 1990, the abolition of the workplace nursery tax had little to offer by way of financial redemption for Camden.[77] Grappling with budgetary limitations, the council proposed a return to their initial graded fee structure first introduced alongside the new nursery a decade previously.

By this point, staff parents were increasingly at odds with the council due to what they perceived as its mismanagement of resources. Parents' concerns about understaffing, the conditions of labor for nursery workers, and the management of the nursery circulating from the mid-1980s now escalated.[78] The change in tax law in 1990 left parent users of Camden's nursery with a high tax bill for the previous year, rendered even higher by

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the fact that understaffing had meant that the nursery's potential places had only been partially filled. In June 1990, the Staff Child Care Parents Group wrote to Camden's councillors to express their frustration. Among their concerns was the desire to ensure that fees and back tax be charged to parents based on their ability to pay or else risk reversing the council's efforts to increase access to the nursery for low-paid workers. In conclusion the group noted that "in the past Camden was at the forefront in the provision of childcare facilities for their staff. It now appears that its new stand is preoccupied with maximizing income when other institutions such as banks etc. are now leading the way in investing positively in this area, for recruitment and retention purposes."[79]As Camden's councilors, committees, and staff debated the management of the council's nursery in 1990, new constraints had begun to shape how its policies were formulated and received. In 1991, the staff nursery came under threat of outright closure for the first time in its decade-long history. It secured a short-term reprieve that year despite further cuts to council services, but by 1994, the staff nursery had closed its doors.[80]

IV. VALUING DIVERSITY: EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES BECOMES A BUSINESS STRATEGY

It was under intensifying financial and political pressure around 1990 that Camden Council finally began to retreat from the equal opportunities framework that had shaped its employment practices for over a decade. Policies initially devised as part of a broad commitment to equal opportunities within the council were largely maintained in principle but were relegated to lower budgetary and institutional priority. It was not only the staff nursery that suffered as a consequence. By 1990, job-sharing numbers within the council had begun to drop. In a February 1990 letter to the Staff and Management Services Committee, the Camden NALGO branch lamented that "the run down in the number of jobshare employees clearly indicates the council's reduced commitment to equal opportunities." It went on to express concern that "vacancies caused by the resignation of one jobshare partner are, in many cases, simply not being advertised," and cited the worrying growth in the council's use of temporary staff.[81] Women employees, who had always comprised a majority of job sharers within the council, were disproportionately affected as a result.[82]

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In 1991, under further financial pressure, Camden eliminated the women's and racial equality committees first formed in 1982 as well as the gay and lesbian committee established in 1986. While some of their responsibilities were relocated into a consolidated equalities committee, others were shifted into departments such as personnel and management services where they became subsidiary to broader management agendas.[83] Camden's NALGO branch raised concerns that successive restructuring by management was leading to the marginalization of equalities policies, which were now to be overseen "without direct accountability to their separate constituencies." The union furthermore expressed its strong opposition to what it deemed "giving management carte blanche to ignore equalities issues."[84]

Through the mouthpiece of the union, council staff also sought to highlight the effects of these changes at an individual level. In an article entitled "Whatever Happened to Equal Opportunities," published in *Public Eye* in 1991, Andy Candler, a council welfare rights officer and wheelchair user reported that "in 1981 Camden bent over backwards to enable me to work for them." Now, however, it seemed to him that his disability and sick leave record were being taken as an indication of low performance as his department considered staff cuts.[85] By 1991, the era of equal opportunities in Camden was coming to a rapid close. There is little doubt that women and other marginalized workers bore the brunt of reorganization and cuts.[86]

It was only in 1995, under the auspices of a new strategy for Camden, that the council was prepared to admit publicly to a lapse in its commitment to equal opportunities and a change in its vision.[87] In an article entitled "Heart of the Matter," Krishna Sarda, Camden's new head of equalities, acknowledged that "since the beginning of this decade Camden has slipped from its position at the forefront of equalities work. The severe financial situation the borough found itself in after 1990 meant equalities work was put on the backburner."[88] What displaced its earlier approach was a new vision for the council and its workers, very much in keeping with developments emerging simultaneously in the commercial sector. Although Camden continued to pay lip service to the importance of equality of opportunity in the 1990s, its focus on equality was gradually subsumed within an emphasis on "valuing diversity."[89]

Camden Council likely borrowed the idea of "valuing diversity" from a book entitled *From Equality to Diversity: A Business Case for Equal Opportunities*, published as the UK's first business textbook on diversity in 1992.[90]

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Coauthored by Rachael Ross and Robin Schneider, independent consultants, former employees of the petroleum company Esso, and a self-described "'dual career' couple intent on achieving balance between home and work responsibilities," the book set out a revised agenda for equal opportunities in the 1990s.[91] Rather than emphasizing the goal of parity between groups, which had been a touchstone of equal opportunities policies, and activist campaigns, since the 1970s, Ross and Schneider urged organizations to reframe their approach around the potentially unique contributions of each individual to their business aims. According to the authors, an emphasis on equality was too easily associated with the antagonistic legal process and with externally imposed values—it seemed a "recipe for confrontation, resistance to change, and lack of progress." Their argument followed that "if organizations can ensure that they are able to treat individuals fairly and they are able to respond flexibly to individual needs, they do not need to worry about groups. Equal Opportunity should look after itself."[92]

Diversity was offered in this formulation as a panacea to the expressly political vision of equality. It was no surprise, therefore, that the organization featured as a case study in the final chapter of the book was Rank Xerox, a company that, through targeted job advertising, had recently managed to increase the number of men working within its traditionally female-dominated workforce. While Ross and Schneider no doubt intended their book to assist businesses in taking greater responsibility for the needs of workers from a wide variety of backgrounds in the workplace, they also offered an apparent justification for a turn away from structural solutions to the problems of discrimination and workplace inequality and back toward the types of individual, ad hoc arrangements that still dominated in most British organizations in the 1990s.

In defining a new framework of "valuing diversity," in contrast to its past equal opportunities policies, in the mid-1990s Camden undertook the project of rewriting its own history. According to a council leaflet published in 1995, "a diversity policy is simply an approach which places a positive value on diversity in the workforce and local people, rather than passively allowing for it." The new policy would offer the "victims of discrimination dignity rather than charity." The policy was held up, moreover, as an "active approach to fairness, something to be energetically sought after rather than being passively awaited."[93] In positioning the council's new diversity policy as empowering employees, the council implied, as had

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Ross and Schneider, that its previous equalities policies had overstepped their reach with the effect of disempowering staff. In the process, Camden erased reference to the decade of concrete benefits that it had instituted in the service of a more equal community, in collaboration with—and most often in direct response to—active staff and union pressure. Implicit in Camden's adoption of a new vocabulary for its employment practice in the mid-1990s was a convenient critique of any interventionist strategy on the part of the council. In practice, this only facilitated the council's more selective approach to supporting employees with distinctive needs in the workplace—including parents.[94]

By settling on the framework of "valuing diversity," Camden Council also embraced a market-oriented vision of the council's future. Parents, and other workers with particular workplace concerns, were not altogether neglected in this context. Instead, while they had once been exemplars of a new approach to reconfiguring the division of labor and building new types of community, they now became stepping-stones on the way to constructing a more competitive organization. From the crisis of 1990 onward, Camden Council expressed the concern that, along with other local authorities, it was "finding it difficult to compete with private industry for scarce skills." Camden referenced innovations taking place in commercial sector employment practice and concluded that the market had now "imposed a stronger discipline" that had rendered equalities policies "a survival strategy rather than a moral indulgence."[95]

In this context, Camden reimagined the creation of flexible jobs and childcare support as constituent parts of a plan to address the problems of recruiting and retaining skilled workers.[96] The council's reconceptualization of these policies was facilitated in some contexts by a willingness to retool the very vocabulary that had most centrally supported its equal opportunities work. Notions such as "flexibility" were gradually disassociated from their implications of support for the needs of employees with caring responsibilities and strategies for shifting the division of labor and became instead catchwords for shaping a more agile, adaptable, and profitable workforce.[97]

In short, equal opportunities policies became a business strategy. Much as Ross and Schneider had urged, the council spoke routinely in the mid-1990s about the performance benefits of diversity, emphasizing that "fairness in employment is in fact also good for business."[98] In addition to the

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goal of "attracting and retaining the best available Human Talent" were the goals of "enhanced marketing efforts," "higher creativity and innovation," and "better problem solving."[99] A workforce that reflected the demographics of the market was seen as essential to meeting "customer's requirements." While the council had long seen itself as a service provider, its emphasis on "customer's" demands was new in the mid-1990s. The end goal of the council's employment policies was not to grow stronger communities but instead to produce satisfied customers. By 1996, the council's embrace of a more market-oriented approach was further reflected in the decision to undertake its first ever corporate plan.

It was also developments abroad in the United States that became key reference points for the council in shaping a new policy framework. In its literature on the "valuing diversity" strategy, the council emphasized that its agenda was formed through a careful examination of "best practice in the USA, the private sector and the UK."[100] While the council was eager to lay claim to the innovations emerging in the private sector and in the United States so as not to be perceived as behind the curve, it was also careful to avoid too strong an association with what they referred to ambiguously as the "American model."[101] The council took pains to point out that its new approach was "not imported from the USA," as if to assuage concerns about too thoroughgoing a transformation at the hands of the market.

The winding down of the era of equal opportunities in Camden in the early 1990s did not go uncontested. In addition to concerns raised by employees through NALGO and through the Staff Child Care Parents Group were those raised by councilors and the council's committees. In January 1990, while acknowledging the need for greater recruitment efforts for skilled workers at the managerial level, the director of law and administration for the Women's Unit insisted that "it is important to ensure that opportunities are created which are not just cynical responses to a recruitment crisis, but have long term benefits for all women, including those who are unskilled, and most vulnerable in a volatile labour market."[102] The Women's Committee was concerned in particular that an emphasis on recruitment and retention, however necessary, contained the "danger of creating a two tiered system of conditions of service." Although they were willing to accept the need to target hard to recruit groups, they reiterated that "the Council's emphasis needs to be on retaining and developing its existing staff," the majority of whom—particularly those in public-facing

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roles—were women.[103] As the council's equal opportunity committee structure narrowed to just one equalities committee by 1991, however, the space for this active reflection on the council's values narrowed along with it.[104]

V. CONCLUSION

In 1995, writing in the journal *Critical Social Policy*, feminist scholars Irene Bruegel and Hilda Kean took stock of the "moment of municipal feminism" in 1980s Britain. Bruegel and Kean concluded that there had been a depoliticization of the equal opportunities agenda within local government. Whereas feminists had set out to transform the labor position of women broadly—first, but not only, by transforming employment practice within local authorities—their agenda had run into financial and political obstacles from the outset. In practice, equal opportunities policies seemed to Bruegel and Kean to "have got stuck at the shortest of all possible agendas: getting some women up the hierarchy, but leaving the majority hanging."[105]

While there were growing numbers of women chief executives and directors in local authorities in the mid-1990s, equal opportunities policies had little if any effect on the pay or conditions of manual workers. There were, in fact, widening pay differentials between women workers in local government over the 1980s.[106] Furthermore, a survey of local government employers with equal opportunities policies throughout Britain in 1993 revealed that benefits including childcare and job sharing were more frequently offered to white-collar workers than to their blue-collar counterparts—a result, Bruegel and Kean concluded, of the relative market power of some women over others and an indication of the incentives driving the implementation of these policies by the early 1990s.[107]

Equal opportunities policies had not, however, always been as market oriented as they were by the early 1990s. Moreover, feminist activism within local government in Camden and elsewhere had made inroads into addressing inequalities of class and race in particular areas of employment policy as late as 1990, even while the material basis for extending benefits to larger numbers of workers shrank. Feminist activism in local councils and in the charitable sector alike had also contributed to maintaining a focus on the experiences of women workers and working parents across a period of tremendous political and economic change. It was perhaps this staging of the figure of the working parent at the heart of contemporary

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debates about labor and gender equality that proved the most enduring legacy of innovative public sector policies for working women and parents.

But while the working parent had entered into discussions of employment policy through the feminist activism of public sector workers in the mid-1970s, by the early 1990s, it had become detached from much of its feminist politics within the sphere of organizational policy. Camden was one of several public sector employers that had drawn attention to the needs of working parents as one group among others—including women, racial minorities, sexual minorities, and people with disabilities—who, it was argued, required particular support in the workplace. Drawing attention to the concerns of working parents had presented an opportunity to challenge the gendered division of labor as much as it had been a mechanism for addressing workers' individual needs. The working parent of the early 1990s was, by contrast, a figure that often obscured questions about the division of labor. It was precisely as organizations in both the public and private sector came under new pressures to compete for skilled women workers that the apparently gender-neutral figure of the working parent rose to cultural prominence. The talk of working parents that coexisted with discussions of working women within British organizations by the early 1990s had more to do with offsetting an apparent focus on women workers than with addressing persistent workplace or, more broadly, social inequalities.

The legacies of a decade of municipal feminist activism and equal opportunities policies in local government and the public sector were more generally uneven. These policies no doubt faltered through an accommodation with the market in the 1990s, privileging middle-class workers over working-class ones. Nonetheless, as Bruegel and Kean suggested in 1995, "some of the new modes of management . . . have at least a tang of feminist thinking." What that "tang" amounted to, and how it fared as working women and working parents emerged as considerations at the heart of commercial sector employment practice in the 1990s, is the subject of the next chapter.

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4 MAKING THE BUSINESS CASE: THE RISE OF THE "FAMILY-FRIENDLY" PRIVATE SECTOR

In December 1978, BBC TV2 aired a documentary film produced by the feminist journalist Yvonne Roberts regarding the challenges facing women hoping to pursue careers in management. The segment told the stories of three women—Geraldine Frost, Sally Craven, and Anne Mansell—who had "against the odds . . . achieved as managers in a man's world." The segment was followed by a panel discussion that featured Roberts; Mansell; Tony Garrett, the chairman of Imperial Tobacco; and Lorraine Paddison, the assistant director of Ashridge Business School, who was overseeing one of the first surveys on the problems confronting women in managerial careers in Britain. The discussion opened with Paddison noting that "the accepted career paths in most organisations were established at a time when most people pursuing them were men, and they aren't really very well suited to women's life patterns." The assembled panel concurred. When the conversation turned to the issue of what should be done about it, however, opinions diverged rapidly.

On the one hand, Roberts made the case that putting pressure on employers to take proactive measures to support women's careers, along with a strong antidiscrimination legal framework, were key to equalizing opportunities for women and men. She developed her point through reference to the United States, where the number of women in management roles was on the rise in the 1970s. She went on to point out that equal pay and sex discrimination legislation that had come into effect in Britain in 1970 and 1975, respectively, was making a difference; for one, the gender pay gap had fallen. Women had earned 63 percent of men's wages in 1973,

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and by 1978, they were earning 75 percent. Nonetheless, the other panelists rejected the prospect of exerting further legal pressure on employers. Paddison insisted that voluntary agreements would be more effective in shifting the climate for women than the "blunt instrument" of the law.[1] Both Paddison and Mansel argued that what was working to encourage employers in the United States might not make sense in the British context—though neither indicated why not.

For Mansel, herself a successful manager, and for Garrett of Imperial Tobacco, the most important obstacles to women's success lay not with organizations or even with women's life patterns—implicitly their primary role in childrearing—so much as with individual women. When the segment's reporter asked Mansel whether she felt that women "by and large get what they deserve," she agreed. Garrett, whose company employed fifteen thousand women in Britain in 1978, only a tiny percentage of whom were in managerial roles, remarked, "I think women sometimes tend to lack assertiveness. I don't think they're quite as tenacious as men." What had begun as a discussion about structural problems facing women pursuing careers ended squarely with a conversation about individual women's abilities and choices. The program concluded with the reporter asking Mansel to speculate on whether her decision not to marry or have children was what had facilitated her remarkably successful career. She claimed that it was not and reiterated that it was a combination of confidence and determination that was the key to success.

In the late 1970s when "Women in Management" aired, few private sector employers in Britain were actively promoting equal opportunities for women employees as a matter of policy. Fewer still were talking about the challenges confronting working parents. Feminist activists organizing in groups and campaigns and, increasingly, through the apparatus of charities and unions were beginning to focus attention on the persistent barriers facing mothers in the workforce. As we have seen, they advocated for ideas like paternity leave, job sharing, and community and workplace nurseries that they hoped would level the playing field for all women and men both at work and at home. Despite this mounting activism, a conversation about the obstacles faced by dual-income households was only just beginning to take shape in the media. There continued to be next to no state support for working parents in Britain, and with the rise of Thatcher, the prospect of change at the national level seemed unlikely. At the same time, the issues

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faced by working parents remained distanced from the agendas of major British businesses even while they began to attract the concern of some public sector employers.

Nonetheless, stirrings of change in the commercial sector in these years laid the groundwork for the transformations to come. The legislative victories of the 1970s brought issues of equal pay into the spotlight, mandated an end to sex discrimination, and guaranteed minimum paid maternity leave for the first time. The pressure to comply with the new legislation and to keep abreast of future changes, alongside awareness of growing grassroots women's activism, created an initial opening for a discussion of women's careers in the private sector. Developments in both Europe and the United States also seemed to herald further change to come. The progressive social and labor directives emerging from the European Economic Community, and the growing interests of American businesses in supporting women workers as part of a highly educated workforce in the United States, reverberated in Britain. By the late 1970s, some major companies, particularly in growing female-dominated industries such as banking and retail, began to create equal opportunities manager positions and to turn their attention to the issue of women's career development for the first time.[2]

Meanwhile, in the 1970s, the emerging interests of the national government and of industry in developing and maintaining a skilled workforce in the context of Britain's deindustrialization led to a new concern with women workers. In 1964, the government had established industrial training boards (ITBs) to be jointly financed by the Manpower Services Commission and by major industry sectors, with the aim of overseeing improvements to the availability, quality, and consistency of work training in Britain. Following the implementation of the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975, ITBs introduced divisions focused on training women, and these provided an early institutional site for considering the obstacles to women's skill attainment and advancement at work.[3] Meanwhile, research and policy organizations, such as the Industrial Society, that were concerned with industrial relations and the quality of working life, likewise began to consider women's training.[4]

On their own, however, neither these legal changes nor an emerging concern with shifting national labor needs were sufficient to provoke British industry to reinvent its relationship to women's careers in the 1970s. For one, as Yvonne Roberts pointed out, the Equal Pay Act and the Sex

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Discrimination Act did not mandate that employers adopt affirmative action measurers to equalize opportunities for workers, or actively encourage women's careers, and companies were content to do the minimum required to comply. Indeed, loopholes in the new laws and tepid enforcement by industrial tribunals meant that employers had significant scope to continue with business as usual.[5] To the extent that European Economic Community directives advanced the cause of women's and parents' rights in British business over the course of subsequent decades, this was far from an automatic process.[6] Sustained activism brought these prospective legal changes to the attention of key decision makers, but feminists nonetheless continued to encounter pushback from both policy makers and business leaders.[7]

The rise of a small but growing group of professional women who were determined to see change in private sector practice was therefore instrumental to the earliest schemes for women's career development in Britain. From the early 1970s onward, women appointed as advisers on women's training within ITBs found themselves with no rulebook to follow but with new counterparts in multiple industries.[8] They quickly forged informal networks to exchange ideas and information—including, at the most basic level, knowledge of where women were working and in what kinds of roles.[9] At the same time, more formal women's professional networks were taking off for the first time. In 1969, Eleanor MacDonald—a wartime intelligence officer who rose to the director level in several Unilever companies over the course of her exceptional career—founded the first official networking group for women executives in Britain. In the 1970s, Women in Management was joined by Women in Banking (later Women in Banking and Finance) and City Women's Network as well as organizations more closely associated with women's liberation movement (WLM) networks such as Women in Media, Women in Libraries, and Women in Publishing.[10] From the late 1970s onward, the activism of women working with and within the private sector, including in new positions of institutional authority, proved as significant as the activism of women who were involved in left activist networks in putting the agenda of women's careers on the table.

It's worth pausing to note the extent to which new interest in the problem of women's careers in the 1980s took shape around the figure of the white middle-class professional mother. New business and government interests in mobilizing the skills of the most educated female workers, and

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the interests of a growing group of women who were invested in their professional status and who tended to be less radical than other feminist activists, intersected around the specific concerns of middle-class, dual-income households. In practice, nascent discussions about the needs of working women and working parents in the 1980s tended to exclude the distinct concerns of working-class women, black women, and single parents. The legacies of these exclusions were inscribed in the remaking of private sector employment policy and practice in the decade that followed.

Whereas in the late 1970s, the question of women's careers and the problem of the working parent remained far from the agenda of most British businesses, by the early 1990s, a sea change had taken place. Over the course of the 1980s, British business discovered new incentives for retaining women employees who continued to bear the disproportionate share of care work in families. In 1991, in a frenzy of publicity, the corporate social responsibility charity Business in the Community launched a glossy new campaign, Opportunity 2000, aimed at spurring companies on in developing family-friendly policies in the lead up to the millennium. In an episode that would have been inconceivable just a decade earlier, then Prime Minister John Major attended the campaign's launch event, where he delivered a speech to several hundred assembled business leaders and politicians about women's inexorable rise to the top.

By the time Opportunity 2000 launched, British and multinational companies ranging from Sainsburys and Barclays to Shell International and WH Smith were making triumphant declarations about their "family friendliness" and active support for women's careers. In only a decade, many of Britain's largest employers had begun to develop new policies and schemes that aimed to keep some women workers with caring responsibilities in the paid workforce: predominately highly skilled professional workers who were the most difficult and costly to replace. They had also begun to intensively market their "family friendliness" to current and prospective employees and to customers. Private companies now found themselves at the helm of devising what appeared, at first glance, to be the very progressive policies that feminists had long advocated. While these new policies in Britain's largest companies were not necessarily representative of the private sector as a whole, to an unprecedented degree, they began to shape the direction of the national conversation about working parenthood, with consequences for working as well as middle-class Britons. With the emergence of

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New Labour, professional dual-income couples became targets of government social policy for the first time.[11]

This chapter asks why and how this dramatic transformation took place. It does so by looking at the meeting ground forged between feminist activists and business interests on the neoliberal terrain of the 1980s through several case studies. It begins with early equal opportunities activism at National Westminster Bank, explores the invention of a "family-friendly" agenda at companies like Sainsbury's, and tracks its reverberations in feminist organizations such as the Working Mothers Association (WMA). It traces the development of a corporate social responsibility agenda around working parents through Opportunity 2000, and looks at the emergence of new public–private partnerships around the needs of working parents through influential projects such as the childcare information center Childcare Links.

Both the demographic and economic changes of the 1980s and feminist activism were key to the development of a national agenda around working parents. The legal changes of the 1970s presented an initial opening for activists to push for change in the commercial sector. In the 1980s, the emergence of widespread concerns about demographic change and skilled labor shortages in the context of an impending single European market and a rapidly globalizing economy propelled the problem of women's careers to the heart of business interests. In this context, feminists with wide-ranging priorities and politics, collaborating across organizations and sectors, seized the opportunity to push agendas such as flexible work, parental leave, and childcare. As they did so, they entered what were at times uncomfortable compromises with the priorities of business, driven by the desire to see incremental progress. This chapter explores what was gained and lost as feminist compromises in the private sector reshaped the meanings of working parenthood and the kinds of support available to working mothers and fathers at the national scale.

I. BANK-GROUND: INVENTING THE BUSINESS CASE

The earliest private sectors efforts to adapt employment practices to the realities of a growing female workforce in postwar Britain arose in banking. Of all of Britain's major industries, banking was among the most reliant on women's work. British banking was also tightly embedded in an

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international commercial network through which it was readily exposed to labor practices in banking in other countries. No one industry was representative of the commercial sector in general in the late 1970s, and even within a given industry, no two companies were alike. Nonetheless, the experience of National Westminster (NatWest), one of the two largest clearing banks in the country in this period, offers a lens into how changes in employment policy and practice were shaped at an organizational level.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, NatWest initiated many of the policies and networks that paved the way for the birth of the family-friendly private sector. In 1981, NatWest instituted the first formal reentry scheme in the country for staff who had previously left the bank. It also introduced the first corporate training course for women managers in Britain, one of the first gender target-setting exercises, and one of the earliest manager-level equal opportunities positions in the country. As it did so, the bank began to shape a new "business case" for equal opportunities. The innovative policies developed at NatWest from the late 1970s did not initially emerge, however, from the kinds of financial calculations about retaining women staff that would, within less than a decade, become the driving force behind the trend toward family-friendly policy. Instead, they came about as a direct result of American grant funding and the ambitions of feminist academics and bank staff in the context of a new legal framework for women's rights.

As an industry, banking had undergone significant change in the 1950s and 1960s. Until the late 1950s, the "big five" clearing banks—Barclays, Lloyds, Midland, National Provincial, and Westminster—dominated the sector. Together they held approximately 80 percent of all deposits in Britain.[12] By the late 60s, however, because of growing competition from new credit-creating institutions, the market share of the big five had fallen by nearly half.[13] In addition, due to mounting pressure from across the political spectrum, in 1971 the government introduced competition among the big five. Whereas the banks had previously operated under an agreement to set uniform rates of interest, they now found themselves in direct competition for customers.[14] Alongside the rapidly changing nature of banking between the 1950s and 1970s, the big five grew quickly in these years. At the same time, the workforce was changing. As banks grew in size, the rates of women's employment increased faster than men's. In the late 1970s, clearing banks were among the largest employers of women in Britain, as

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was the case across Europe. Between 7 and 9 percent of the total female workforce in Britain, France, and the Netherlands were employed in banking or insurance, and women comprised a higher percentage of employees in banking than the percentage of women in the workforce at large in these countries.[15] By 1978, women made up 53 percent of all bank staff at NatWest—up from 48 percent a decade previously.[16]

Despite the changing nature of British banking, the high numbers of women in banking by the 1970s, and the growing numbers of married women in paid work in Britain generally, banks remained dominated by highly traditional career structures.[17] Through the late 1970s, men and women typically joined banks as school leavers. To rise up the career ladder depended upon remaining with one organization on an uninterrupted basis and on a willingness to move around the country—factors that favored men's careers. Likewise, progression depended upon taking banking exams for which young men were actively encouraged and women, in many cases, actively discouraged.[18]

In 1978, nearly 90 percent of all women employed by British banks were under age thirty-four compared to just 50 percent of men. Even women who remained employed without interruption did not progress on a comparable basis to men. In the late 1970s more than 75 percent of women workers in banking in Britain were in clerical jobs, and more than 96 percent remained below the management level. This structure amounted to a two-tier model where young women were understood to be in jobs at the bank, whereas men were developing "careers." Until the introduction of equal pay legislation in 1970, pay in banking was age related. In practice, this meant that a seventeen-year-old female school leaver working as a cashier might earn a quarter of what a fifty-year-old male cashier earned for the same work. The introduction of equal pay based on job grades rather than age in 1971, as a direct result of the new legislation, was a critical first step to shifting the status and perception of women's work within banking.[19]

The transnational wave of support for equal rights for women across Euro-America in this period encouraged the proliferation of new policy projects aimed at advancing women's rights—particularly in the United States. In 1978, because of its importance as an employer of women across the European Community, banking was chosen as the focus of a new action research program. The German Marshall Fund, an American public policy institute and grant-making body concerned with transatlantic issues,

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financed the new project with the aim of stimulating affirmative action for women's employment in Europe.

While new affirmative action programs in American companies in the 1970 were succeeding in advancing growing numbers of women into management, similar programs had yet to emerge in Europe.[20] After being approached to participate in the project, Baroness Nancy Seear, a reader in Personnel Management at the London School of Economics (LSE) and a well-known advocate of women's rights, and her junior colleague, Margery Povall, a social science researcher who had completed a diploma in personnel management, applied and received funding.[21] Relying on her reputation and connections within the world of personnel management, Seear then recruited NatWest to participate in the project as a representative of British banking.[22] NatWest joined on the understanding that the bank would consider making changes to its policies once it had been presented with the study's research findings. Additional banks agreed to participate in Belgium, the Netherlands, and France, respectively, and research teams came together under the umbrella of the Marshall project in those countries.[23]

Between 1978 and 1980, Povall led an extensive research project at NatWest under Seear's supervision. She gathered statistics, consulted historical materials, interviewed managers and trade union representatives, and conducted five surveys of bank staff.[24] The first survey explored the experiences of 190 male and female clerical staff at three different sites to understand the effects of gender on mobility and therefore career prospects. The second survey looked at the experiences of just twelve senior women identified in the bank, most of whom worked in middle management in personnel divisions. Finally, Povall conducted three surveys regarding the experiences of NatWest women in navigating paid work alongside domestic responsibilities.[25] In 1978, she traveled to the United States to gather data on equal opportunities practice at Citibank. Throughout the duration of the project, she worked closely with NatWest's General Manager Gordon Jones and his personal assistant Susan Law—one of the most senior women at the bank. Povall also exchanged notes and ideas with Citibank in the United States and met with research teams elsewhere in Europe.[26]

From the outset, the aim of the research project was to transform rather than simply to document the status quo at NatWest. Povall's surveys evolved in response to the barriers she uncovered as she learned about the bank, in dialogue with its management. By interviewing clerical staff

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regarding mobility, Povall hoped to respond to managers' tendency to see women as less ambitious than men. Interviews with senior women at the bank were intended to shed light on obstacles to women's progression into management but no doubt equally to draw attention to women's leadership potential. Finally, it was hoped that research into women's experiences of domestic responsibilities alongside their paid work for the bank would support a case for reemploying women staff who had left NatWest due to caring roles and support additional changes to support women's careers.

In practice, the process of studying NatWest as an embedded researcher intent upon transforming the bank's policies was challenging. For one, although he had been persuaded to participate in the project, Gordon Jones was initially skeptical.[27] It is likely only because of the growing pressure on businesses to comply with the equal pay and sex discrimination legislation of the 1970s that the bank initially consented to the project. Some of the overt opposition that emerged to Povall and Seear's work at NatWest was jocular in tone, but it nonetheless conveyed the slow pace of organizational change. According to Povall's research notes from a lunch meeting with Seear, Jones, and two additional male personnel managers in March 1979, Jones informed the group that he had prepared his colleagues for the meeting by telling them to "resist everything possible."[28] While Jones and his colleagues were willing to discuss the possibility of new projects at the bank, including a career development course for eight women, an off-site workshop for senior women, and the idea of a pilot reentry scheme, they were even happier to draw firm boundaries about what they would not consider. Humorous rebuffs to Povall and Seear's work at NatWest helped to delineate the extent of the senior management's willingness to engage with their project.

As Povall worked along with Susan Law to build Jones' trust, she encountered opposition from multiple directions. Reflecting on her research experience at NatWest, Povall recalls that managers were, to a depressing degree, generally dubious about the prospect of women's careers.[29] As her work pushed up against the traditional structure of career progression in banking, managers pushed back, at times telling Povall directly not to disrupt their model.[30] At the same time, Povall and her colleagues were struck that younger, less senior men were no more receptive to their work. It was often men lower down on the career ladder who appeared to feel most threatened by the prospect of affirmative action programs for women.[31] Even

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where there was not transparent opposition to the project, it nonetheless provoked unease. After presenting on her research findings to the NatWest Staff Association in May 1980, Povall concluded "they were probably frightened and threatened at first. . . . They looked as though they had never reviewed the situation."[32] The process of building support for the Marshall project required Povall and her colleagues to contend with apprehension and at times outright disapproval.

During her time at NatWest, Povall nonetheless made headway. At the end of the same 1979 meeting where he appeared to warn Povall and Seear against pushing the envelope too far, according to Povall, Jones also noted that "he felt we had the confidence of his senior personnel people, that we had shown we understood the organisation, and didn't expect too much of it, and that we should be able to develop a relationship useful to both sides."[33] Advancing a feminist agenda at NatWest was a decidedly different affair than had been the case in Camden Council, where a left-wing political consensus between workers and management had underwritten the creation of equal opportunities policy. Povall's research project made readily apparent the tremendously varied cultural attitudes toward women's work in circulation in late 1970s Britain.

While a vast majority of managers were skeptical of, or simply disinterested in Povall's agenda of advancing women's careers at the bank, there were a growing number who were intrigued by the possibility of change. Once Povall established a repertoire with Jones, in early 1980 he invited her to present to NatWest's regional managers on the experience of Citibank—referred to for the purposes of the presentation as Bank X—in the United States.[34] Povall explained to the assembled managers that Bank X had managed to increase the number of women in more senior jobs by making very minor changes such as adjusting their grading system. In response, one manager in attendance informed her that he had "offered jobs and more responsibility to women employees and they have refused them," and another described Povall and Seear dismissively as "funny researchers." A third, however, asked questions which Povall noted, "I think showed interest."[35]

Following her presentation, a handful of regional managers reached out to express their interest in the project.[36] When Povall wrote to her contact, Eileen Morley, at Citibank in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to report on the event, she described the presentation as "markedly successful," noting that

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it had helped to establish her credibility. She also thanked Morley for her advice to "address them where they live"—a nod to an evolving feminist strategy for challenging discrimination at work.[37] Feminists working within banking perused an approach of gradual reform, not revolution.

A number of concrete, modest steps were taken to encourage some women's careers at the bank as a result of Povall's research at NatWest under the auspices of the German Marshall Fund. In March 1979, Jones expressed enthusiasm for a survey of women who had left NatWest due to caring responsibilities, with the intention of attracting women back on a pilot reentry scheme.[38] Shortly thereafter, in early 1980, Povall and her colleagues conducted a survey of 208 women who had left the bank for so-called domestic reasons. The survey revealed that most of these women were interested in returning to work at NatWest and many had been unable to do so because their roles required full-time employment.[39] Within the group surveyed, the researchers identified an initial twenty-six women who they considered likely to be interested in returning within a few months. Of these women, eighteen indicated their willingness to be contacted for hiring purposes.[40]

In April 1980, a group of relevant regional managers agreed to consider rehiring the eighteen women identified, though they did so reluctantly. Disappointed with the response time of one potential reentrant who was invited in for interview, a regional personnel manager, Alec Anderson, made clear that he thought she was not showing adequate interest.[41] Povall emphasized in vain that it was not enough to simply offer the women positions but that they also needed support and convincing that the bank had abandoned its "negative attitudes."[42] The regional managers expressed frustration, moreover, that many of the women identified were part-time workers and clerical staff rather than "career" women. Despite these objections, between June and September 1980, eight women rejoined NatWest in a pilot scheme. Meanwhile, the concerns raised by the regional managers in April about the absence of "career women" within the initial group were reiterated elsewhere. This proved the impetus for a second survey later in the year of a set of forty-seven women bank employees who were on, or were about to go on, maternity leave and who the bank was particularly interested in reemploying due to their level of experience.

Following the two surveys, Povall and her colleagues published a new set of recommendations for the bank. These included redesigning clerical

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grade jobs for maximum use of part-time employees, encouraging women on maternity leave to study for Institute of Bankers exams, paying women returning to the bank at a pay scale appropriate to their proven skill and ability, parental leave provision for both men and women, flexible work hours wherever possible, and the provision of childcare facilities. Among these recommendations, only reentry at the appropriate skill level was taken up by the time the bank instituted its first official reentry scheme in 1981. The other ideas outlined by the LSE researchers remained steps too far for the bank in the early 1980s. The initial official reentry scheme was made available to highly skilled employees, female or male, who had achieved grades A, B, or E.[43] Under the terms of the scheme, employees were entitled to take a break of up to five years to rear children provided that they agree to work a minimum of two weeks per year during their career break and to keep in touch through monthly information packs and contact with local offices.[44]

As a result of the pilot reentry scheme, small numbers of mothers began to return to the bank for the first time. Many of these initial reentrants were delighted by the opportunity to return to work, though it raised new challenges of reconciling paid employment with caring responsibilities at home. For many of the women interviewed, returning to work after maternity leave affected their sense of identity—whether as workers now pursuing "careers" rather than just jobs, as family members contributing to household income, or both.[45] The initial numbers of participants was limited, however, and it was less the early reentry schemes themselves than the process of instituting them and the rational for their implementation that had lasting consequences for the private sector and its workers.

What was established along with NatWest's first reentry schemes was a tentative new meeting ground between the aims of business and the goals of feminists willing to work in and with the commercial sector. NatWest leadership was willing to rethink the place of women's work within the bank, and even to advocate for a shift in attitudes among its managers, but only insofar as it suited them—in this case by implementing a reentry scheme exclusively for the most highly trained staff who it would be most costly to replace. The bank was prepared to address the needs of women staff through its new policies but equally insisted on downplaying what might appear to be a disproportionate focus on women. When it came to the reentry scheme, they indicated publicly that it was open to men as well

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as women, although the scheme was designed entirely for and in practice applied exclusively to women staff—entirely in cases of maternity leave.[46]

At the same time, Povall and her research team were prepared to back away from their more ambitious goals to see initial change take place at the bank. In her April 1980 notes from a planning meeting on the new reentry scheme, Povall reflected "I did not take up various points because it seemed more important that the bank was doing things than that we were getting things exactly as we wanted them. Slater was being very decisive and forcing them to commitment. I felt that my interventions would not help this."[47] What developed at the juncture between NatWest and Povall's research project was a new logic for shifting employment practice—what would later be known as the business case.

The German Marshal–funded project had given Povall's research team and NatWest a mutual goal—to consider the barriers to women's career progression within the bank and to consider implementing affirmative action programs. What they had not provided was a functional rationale; it was the conversations that occurred among willing participants at NatWest beginning in 1978 that began to shape one. In appeals to the bank to implement changes in policy, Povall focused both on what the bank stood to gain and what they stood to lose. By failing to act, NatWest was losing skilled employees. Women who left to have children, and who found they could not reenter at an appropriate pay level under working conditions that allowed them to attend to their family responsibilities simultaneously, were simply going to find work elsewhere. This was a loss to NatWest and to the rigidly structured banking industry, Povall suggested, but not necessarily to the economy as a whole—where married women with children were working in ever higher numbers.[48] On the flip side, if the bank acted to support women's careers, it could capitalize on the demographic changes favoring an increasingly female skilled workforce.[49]

As early as 1979, when he wrote to regional managers to request their participation in setting promotion targets for women staff for the first time, Gordon Jones had ostensibly embraced these arguments. He wrote, "Quite apart from ensuring that we do not offend against the requirements of the equal opportunities legislation, there is the much more pressing need to use our available resources to their fullest extent."[50] Those resources, of course, were human ones. NatWest became the first British bank to officially endorse this logic, but by 1982, others were catching up.

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In 1978, in response to the new legal framework for equal rights, Midland Bank had appointed a manager to focus on equal opportunities issues and had begun to offer regional seminars for "career women."[51] It was not until 1982, however, that the bank expanded its aims and increased its efforts to reach managers through the establishment of an equal opportunities working party tasked with increasing the number of women promoted by the bank.[52]

In the same year, the German Marshall Fund entered a new phase. Having overseen the institution of the first affirmative action projects for women in Europe, the fund set out to encourage the proliferation of these programs. Working with the European Commission, the German Marshall Fund hosted a conference for European bankers on affirmative action, which ultimately resulted in additional UK and European banks initiating action programs.[53] Further conferences were held in 1983 and 1985. Four years after Povall and her colleagues had first started to work with NatWest, a new precedent had been set in the banking industry.

The German Marshall Fund's affirmative action project had an additional, and less direct, consequence that would ultimately serve as a catalyst for change in British industry well beyond the banking sector. In the autumn of 1979, to complement Povall and Seear's more formal research, NatWest invited a dozen of the most senior women at the bank to a two-day seminar at Heythrop Park in the Cotswolds to discuss their career experiences and to come up with a set of recommendations on women's training needs.[54] The Heythrop meeting produced a set of recommendations, but far more importantly, it functioned as an inadvertent consciousness-raising exercise. Anne Watts, a participant in the meeting who would later be appointed as equal opportunities manager at NatWest and go on to a long career in workplace equality issues, remembers the Heythrop meeting as an experience of a small group of women realizing that their individual experiences were in fact common ones.[55]

Shortly after the Heythrop seminar in early 1980, a number of the participants met at the LSE along with senior women from other British banks to discuss the challenges facing women at work. They then formed Women in Banking. The new organization became a network of advocates for women's careers in the industry and formed a critical base of support for further initiatives. Initial members of Women in Banking such as Anne Watts were also instrumental a decade later in the formation of cross-industry projects

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IS THERE LIFE AFTER MOTHERHOOD?

Yes, say the women who went back to work

Focus on the Re-Entry and Reservist schemes

PARTICIPANTS on the Bank's Re-Entry and Reservist schemes, which allow staff who have attained A, B or E tiering to take a break in their careers of up to five years to rear children, gathered for a conference at the NatWest Tower. This marked the third anniversary of the introduction of the two schemes.

Of the 43 participants, 30 were able to attend and looked happy and relaxed, having left their offspring in the care of relatives, husbands or babysitters.

A measure of their commitment was shown by the fact that one woman had travelled from Cumbria, another from Merseyside, and a third had caught the early train from Plymouth in order to be present.

The conference was organised by Anne Watts, Career Planning Adviser, Personnel Division, who introduced the guest speaker, Charlotte Chambers, Principal Lecturer in the Faculty of Management Studies, Polytechnic of Central London.

Mrs Chambers, herself a mother of three, spoke with warmth, wisdom and a wealth of experience of the difficulties and rewards of combining a career with being the linchpin of a family.

Having resumed part-time lecturing when her children were small, Mrs Chambers increased this gradually and finally went back to work full-time when her husband wanted to set up his own business.

'When the children are small, it is all too easy for a woman to lose her confidence and to feel that she has nothing to offer to the outside labour market,' she said. 'And even working in a part-time capacity, you miss out on things that happen in your department, and on things that are being discussed when you are not there.

'When I started full-time work, everybody benefited.'

She continued: 'My husband had a more interesting wife, the money was much-needed at the time, and we had more fun as a family, taking other children out at weekends in return for their parents meeting my children from school.

'You will find that your biggest allies are your husbands and children.' Mrs Chambers noted.

She pointed out that companies are now recognising that women can bring special and very valuable skills into management. 'Women tend to be less constrained by hierarchical status,' she explained, 'and more honest in highlighting problems which could arise if certain suggestions were implemented.

'Also, the experience of motherhood and the perspective it gives one is of value. It teaches you to be more considerate of people and to help subordinates to develop.'

Housework

A survey recently undertaken by the Organisation for Economic and Com-

Proving their commitment to both motherhood and a career, 30 of the 43 participants in the Bank's Re-Entry and Reservist schemes participated in a conference held at the NatWest Tower. Pictured are: back row from left: Kay Rees, Sara Whitaker, Dawn Phillips, Karen Pascall, Margaret Royle, Margaret Lamacraft, Dorothy Pearce, Lynda Hill, Tina Mitchell, Celia Granger, Ellie McGeehan, Debbie Hobbs, Ann Wright, Geraldine Reid and Career Planning Adviser, Personnel Division, Anne Watts. Seated, left hand row, from back: Alison Coombs, Lynn Frost, Zeena Gooch and Lynne McMillan. Second row: Julie Hart, Elizabeth Evanson, Susan Rymer and Sheena Hodson. Third row: Peggy Cowdry, Lynda Storey and Helen Snelgrove. Fourth row: Carol Smith, Valerie Baker and Diane Snelgrove. Kneeling: Susan Vosper. Fifth row: Stella Saul and Jan Hart.

FIGURE 4.1
Is There Life after Motherhood? Reproduced by kind permission of NatWest (1984).

such as Opportunity 2000, which from 1991 saw the issue of women's careers rise to national prominence.

In December 1984, NatWest held an event to honor the three-year anniversary of its first official reentry and reservist scheme. According to an article entitled "Is There Life after Motherhood?" in NatWest's staff magazine *Bankground* (figure 4.1), the forty-three original participants in the scheme were invited to a daylong conference convened by Anne Watts at the NatWest Tower in London. The speakers and discussions aimed to acknowledge the women's "commitment to both motherhood and career" and moreover to publicize the bank's programs. Gordon Jones attended, emphasizing both the bank's determination to continue the scheme and the responsibility of the entirely female participants themselves to ensuring its success. Jones told the assembled group, "Let there be no doubt in your minds of the commitment of top management to the scheme of which you are a part." At the same time, he compared the mothers in attendance to the American pioneers and suggested that they too had a role to play: "In many ways . . . this is like the making of the United States. You are the

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pioneers, and as pioneers you will encounter difficulties but you must grit your teeth and push the frontier forward."[56] By 1984, there was an increasingly widespread sense in British industry of the potential business case for implementing programs to retain skilled women staff. The rhetoric invoked by Jones, however, reflected the trajectory that NatWest itself had taken, in which the force of new equalities legislation, the model of the United States, and the activism of women researchers had been critical to initiating the first changes in employment policy.

II. SHAPING A CORPORATE AGENDA FOR WORKING FAMILIES

In November 1986, Anne Watts—now serving as equal opportunities manager at NatWest bank—delivered a paper at the European Women's Management Development Conference held in Hamburg, Germany. Her talk, entitled "Managing the Future," signaled the beginning of a new era in corporate employment practices. Just back from a German Marshall funded visit to the United States as part of a drive to update NatWest's now six-year-old research on women's careers, Watts carefully outlined the business case for positive action. She began by describing the unprecedented level of competition in the British banking industry, fueled by the sudden deregulation of financial markets earlier that year. She also noted that the oversupply of labor that had characterized the 1970s was gone; companies across industries now had little choice but to turn to previously "untapped talent"—most critically women.

Happily, Watts commented, employers' needs "complemented the growing number of women recognising that they wanted a career—not simply a job with no horizons," and she went on to emphasize the increasing number of women with higher education in the workforce. She added that women—long ignored as a source of management talent—were uniquely equipped with skills such as flexibility, adaptability, and innovativeness that were "only now being valued by organizations as appropriate to their strategic goals." She concluded her talk with something between a strong recommendation and a threat, informing the audience that "unless companies want their brightest women managers to leave through frustration to head up smaller companies or establish businesses of their own, they are going to have to make way."[57] In Watts's mind, it was time for a radical reassessment of personnel policies across the commercial sector.

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In her talk, Watts drew on the notion of human capital, popularized most notably by Gary Becker from the mid-1960s, to suggest that companies should invest in the development of their employees as resources capable of generating returns both financial and psychological in nature.[58] It was only beginning in the mid-1980s that the American import of human resources management, which incorporated notions of human capital, began to reshape British personnel policy, and Watts, among others, strategically drew on its language to highlight the value of women's skills in the private sector.[59] From Watts's perspective, growing numbers of women were now motivated to succeed in the business world, and if employers would not invest in them, they would simply invest in themselves and establish their loyalties elsewhere.

By the time that Watts spoke in Hamburg in late 1986, the issue of women's careers had gained an institutional foothold within banking, and other professional bodies had begun to take note. However, in the mid-1980s, it was still the case that few commercial employers were looking to address persistent calls for more support for working parents, and in particular the growing numbers of working mothers, in the British workforce. It would take new concerns about the labor market and a new emphasis on parents and families, rather than mothers, to shape the changes that Watts envisioned. But the mid-1980s, in the absence of large-scale change in the commercial sector, the most important development was the formation of new links among women who were challenging workplace inequality from within very different institutional and political contexts.

In the mid-1980s, feminist charities that had emerged out of 1970s activism looked increasingly to the commercial sector as they sought reliable financial support amid dwindling local government resources for feminist projects. It was around this time that Lucy Daniels—the founder of the WMA—contacted Joanna Foster, who from 1981 was heading the Pepperell Unit of the Industrial Society, where her role was to advance women's work training. Foster in turn put Daniels in touch with Anne Watts at NatWest, who was by then well known for her pioneering work on women's careers. In 1985, Daniels approached Watts to ask whether the bank would be willing to support the costs of producing a monthly newsletter for members of the still entirely volunteer-run WMA. Watts, who was sympathetic to the WMA's work in supporting local self-help groups of largely professional working mothers, sent Daniels to see the head of NatWest's Corporate

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Community Affairs department. There, Daniels managed to secure a small grant for her organization.[60] It was through this sponsorship that the WMA continued to be able to provide advice about combining parenthood and paid work to women across Britain. The sponsorship also marked a turning point at NatWest, where predominately white middle-class working mothers became an object of corporate charitable giving for the first time.[61] It represented, above all, the growth of a new pragmatic feminist network linking business to the charitable sector.

New connections were also forged between the worlds of business and journalism in the mid-1980s. In 1986, Alison Maitland joined the *Financial Times*, where she would remain for two decades. Maitland became one of a small group of prominent women journalists, including Yvonne Roberts at the *Guardian* and Fran Abrams at *The Independent*, who would come to cover the changing realities of women's paid work and new kinds of employment practices. By the late 1990s, Maitland's work gave the subject of women's careers unprecedented attention in the pages of Britain's most respected business newspaper.[62] Watts recalls that this publicity ultimately had a critical role in changing the perception of women's work within the corporate world, as managers were increasingly forced to confront the issue of women's careers as a business concern and a matter of competitive status within their industries.[63]

If the mid-1980s were characterized by new links between feminist activists and the world of business, and by growing awareness of the issue of women's careers, it was the late 1980s that marked a decisive turning point in commercial sector employment practice. From the late 1980s onward, reports about declining numbers of school leavers emerging from the Department of Employment and from Warwick University's Institute for Employment Research raised new alarm about the future labor supply.[64] New forecasts about a shrinking labor force were of particular concern to large companies, especially those in the growing British service industry. The concerns about impending demographic and economic change that had, with American financial influence, shaped the business case for women's career development at NatWest in the early 1980s now became widespread. What was soon referred to in business, activism, and the media alike as the "demographic time bomb" paved the way for corporate engagement with the concerns of working women on an unprecedented scale.

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Among the growing number of companies raising the alarm about the changing demographics of Britain's workforce, the supermarket chain Sainsbury's became a leader. In a 1989 strategic brief, John Adshead, the head of Sainsbury's personnel division, outlined the concerning prospects facing British employers—an anticipated 20 percent fall in the number of young people leaving schools and colleges and a corollary rise in the number of young people entering higher education and delaying their participation in the labor market. Looking ahead to the 1990s, Adshead concluded that "the size of the workforce in total will not decline, but it will be very different in composition—with more women, for example, and older workers—but only if we manage to persuade groups currently under-represented in the workforce to make themselves available."[65]

As had been the case within banking, the principal concern at Sainsbury's and elsewhere in the service industry was to recruit and retain skilled staff. Women, who constituted two-thirds of Sainsbury's one-hundred-thousand-person workforce, were, as Watts and others had long emphasized, the obvious source of "untapped" management talent.[66] Sainsburys now embraced the call to invest in their human resources. For Adshead, recruitment and retention were problems "both in terms of the jobs and careers we can offer and the way in which we market our opportunities."[67] Sainsbury's set about reshaping both.

Already in 1988, the company had revised its store management structure to "make hours of work more compatible with family and professional commitments." At the same time, Sainsbury's introduced a new level of first-line management available to staff—most of them women—who were working on a part-time basis.[68] Now, Adshead's personnel division increased its efforts. It began to draw attention to the costs of staff turnover within the organization, thus ensuring that managers at all levels understood its centrality to the company's profitability in the long term. The division also took several concrete steps aimed unambiguously at addressing the challenges facing working mothers. Although it was staff generally who were the stated beneficiaries of the company's new policies, they were in fact aimed squarely at the needs of women with caring responsibilities and particularly those women occupying the most senior positions.

In 1989, Sainsbury's instituted a formal career break scheme—nearly identical to NatWest's—for management-level staff who wished to take time off to care for young children.[69] The company also took new steps to

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limit work hours for some staff by reducing weekly contractual hours for retail management from forty-four to thirty-nine. In addition, it advertised new, more "stable" management opportunities for staff who were "unable to fulfil our mobility requirements." The company was keen to point out that these positions were "particularly popular with women returning from maternity leave."[70] Most strikingly, Sainsbury's took on the complex issue of childcare. In 1989, it piloted an experimental on-site day nursery scheme for staff at its new Stretham branch in South London. It also announced a pilot childcare voucher scheme intended to provide financial support for working parents and began experimenting with term-time contracts at a number of branches in the hopes of attracting women with school-age children back to work on a part-time basis.[71]

In its decisive turn toward considering the challenges faced by working mothers in the late 1980s, Sainsbury's was not alone. In the mid-1980s, research at Midland Bank revealed that 70 percent of employees who left the company on maternity leave—with an average of eleven years of experience at the bank—were not returning. The bank cited the lack of childcare as a key factor in influencing its decision. In 1988, Midland announced plans to open three hundred highly subsidized workplace nurseries and sixty holiday play schemes for school-aged children across Britain over four years.[72] Behind the unprecedented workplace childcare scheme was none other than Anne Watts, now working in a director-level equal opportunities role at Midland.[73]

At the Boots Company, an employer of eighty thousand staff across Britain, including forty-nine thousand women, the late 1980s also proved a turning point. While career breaks, part-time return to work, and some flexible working hours were already in place by the late 1980s at Boots, in 1989 the company instituted formal flexible "working parent contracts" and a job-sharing scheme for the first time. By 1991, it reported that the schemes had aided efforts to retain women staff and had doubled the number of women in management positions, reducing turnover. According to Boots personnel manager Anne Toler, these policies were shaped alongside "researching and planning our response to demographic trends as a business issue."[74]

Ultimately, these mounting concerns about profitability drove innovation in personnel policy in the British commercial sector. Even while it was recognized that growing corporate interest in women workers was driven

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by profit motivations, policy changes met with widespread enthusiasm, including on the left. As one commentator concluded, "Enlightened self-interest is coming into its own, and that is no bad thing."[75] In part, this acceptance stemmed from the desire to see signs of incremental change. However, it was perhaps also the result of a new culture of entrepreneurial selfhood in which individuals, as much as organizations, began to embrace the logic of human capital investment.[76]

Even the early pioneers of new employment practices such as NatWest experienced the late 1980s as a period of decisive change. In 1991, the bank's personnel division reflected that "until recently, there have been pockets of resistance . . . however, these kinds of attitudes have recently started to change." The bank went on to site three reasons for the shift. First, it noted that "people have been persuaded that some policies make business sense. . . . It is amazing what '£' signs do to end an argument!" Second, it cited the emerging view that quality in hiring mattered more than quantity as a long-term strategy for retaining skilled workers and remaining competitive. Third, it suggested that there had been a cultural shift "due to the breakdown of the 'job for life' concept, and assumption that complete commitment to the organisation overrides all other things" and a corresponding emergence of greater acceptance of discussion about "spouses, children, hobbies and interests, and balancing different needs and wants" at work. As a result, NatWest proudly reported that it had, from 1989, managed to pilot new flexible working schemes, offer a new counseling service for women in (or returning from) the career break scheme, and provide information to staff about childcare options.[77]

If financial considerations propelled new business efforts to reshape employment practices in the late 1980s, financial considerations also limited the scope of these new policies. At Boots, Anne Toler acknowledged that the organization had been "concerned to continue to develop schemes and initiatives that can be shown to be cost effective—in a short timescale."[78] For one, this meant that workplace nurseries "emerged as a non-starter for business/ cost reasons" at the pharmacy chain—as was the case in numerous other companies.[79] Nearly everywhere, it meant—at least initially—that new flexible working schemes, leave provision, and childcare benefits were limited to only some, generally high-level staff who proved the most costly to replace. On the most fundamental level, financial considerations also determined the kinds of businesses that even considered adopting new

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employment policies in this period. While it was increasingly profitable for large corporations in female-dominated sectors to revise their approach, this was less true in midsize organizations. In the mid-1990s, the nearly 250 corporate members of the by then renamed Parents at Work clustered primarily into two groups—large corporations and small commercial employers with distinctive cultures that valued women's work.[80] The policies developed at large organizations like Boots and Sainsbury's by no means disseminated as a matter of course into British workplaces more generally.[81]

Political considerations as much as financial ones shaped the limitations of new employment policies where they were implemented. Writing as a representative of the personnel division of the recently privatized British Petroleum (BP) Exploration company in 1991, Penelope King reported that "perhaps the biggest change in BP Exploration over the past 12 months has been the company's attitude to women. The initiative is keen to promote women whilst not positively discriminating in favour of women."[82] King made explicit what had long implicitly been the case for corporate employers. Much as they wished to recruit and retain skilled women staff, they did not wish to be seen as privileging women workers—in other words, to be viewed as endorsing a feminist agenda.

This was also apparent in the language adopted alongside the embrace of new employment policies. As had been the case at NatWest, policies intended specifically to alleviate the challenges faced by working mothers were introduced in the name of recruitment and retention or, increasingly, on behalf of working parents and in the name of family-friendly workplaces. Whereas in some public sector workplaces in the 1980s new employment policies for those with caring responsibilities were introduced with both women and men in mind, in the commercial world the language of the working parent tended to obscure the real intention of new policies. In short, transforming the gendered division of labor was not on the minds of British executives even as they began to respond to some of the longstanding demands of feminist activists.

By 1990, the consequences of the distinctive gender politics of corporate employment practice had begun to reverberate beyond the commercial sector and into the charitable and activist networks that had forged ties with British business in the mid-1980s. In 1994, the Working Mothers Association officially changed its name to Parents at Work (PAW). There were several motivations for the name change, including the long-standing desire

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to increase the visibility of men as caregivers and shift the division of labor by asserting that men shared the concerns of working mothers at work and at home.[83] The name change also had an external impetus, however. According to the organization's notes, "The name Working Mothers is some hindrance to fundraising and membership—charities and companies have a bit of a block about the name."[84]

Despite some success in attracting corporate support from the mid-1980s, businesses, it seemed, were wary of being overly associated with a feminist agenda. Reflecting back on the developments in British corporate practice in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Lucy Daniels recalls that "it suddenly felt divisive not to include fathers."[85] PAW was well aware at the time that changing its name and focus raised questions for the charity, most critically "are we largely a feminist organisation supporting women, or are we supporting families?"[86] Nevertheless, it was now corporations, in their determination to keep ahead of the equal rights legal framework and increasingly each other, that were directing the conversation that had once been shaped principally by charities. If the emphasis on working parents, rather than working mothers, could in theory promote a more equal gendered division of labor, in practice it could serve equally to obscure the reality of the unequal social distribution of caring work.

In shaping new employment policies and practices in British corporations over the course of the 1980s, two kinds of rhetoric had been at work. There was, on the one hand, an emerging recognition that the status of women in the workplace and their relative absence in management roles had to do with their share of caring responsibilities at home—particularly as parents—rather than to do with their innate abilities or qualities as workers. This recognition was accompanied, however, by an emphasis on women's distinctive qualities—ranging from adaptability and flexibility to underconfidence and lack of assertiveness. These were sometimes imagined as complementary skills along highly gendered lines—as in the formulation "task Harry, process Mary."[87] Despite the new logic of human capital investment that saw these qualities positively in terms of potential returns on investment in a changing economy, they remained soft skills that harkened back to earlier claims about women's unsuitability in the workforce, as much they imagined a place for women in workplaces of the future.[88]

By the early 1990s, these imagined subjects of new employment policies were joined by a third characterization, which posited genderless workers

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with lives outside of work—signified by the shorthand of parents or of families—as the beneficiaries of private sector policy change. As much as the notion of a working parent obscured distinctions of gender, it also obscured the different experiences of working-class and black Britons at work. As companies began to compete for skilled women workers on a new scale from the early 1990s, rhetoric about women and their abilities, about parents, and about the needs of families mingled. It was within these varied and inconsistent formulations regarding the intent of new employment policies that the agendas of very different political actors began to cohere around new solutions to the problem of the "working parent."

III. OPPORTUNITY 2000 AND THE LIMITS OF CORPORATE FAMILY FRIENDLINESS

In the early 1990s, the business case got a boost from new efforts to harness business' public relations concerns to the goal of greater support for working parents. Beginning in 1990, the WMA had issued Employer of the Year awards accompanied by elaborate award ceremonies and dinners with the goal of highlighting success stories and consequently pushing employers to make progress on issues such as flexible work hours, childcare, leave, and reentry. For Lucy Daniels, these events were part of an aggressive positive publicity strategy intended to attract media attention, and it was soon adopted as a widespread tactic for persuading businesses to address the demands of working parents.[89]

In October 1991, the corporate social responsibility charity Business in the Community launched its new campaign, Opportunity 2000. The campaign was set up in response to a 1990 Hansard Society Commission report entitled "The Report of the Hansard Society Commission on Women at the Top," which showed that women remained wildly underrepresented at the highest levels of organizations.[90] Over the course of the 1990s, Opportunity 2000 would become a driving force in articulating the business case in Britain and would oversee new national political interest in the issues of childcare and flexible working practices for working parents.[91] The campaign's stated aim of accelerating the pace of change in businesses through corporate collaboration was, in practice, a formalization of the competition already underway among British employers by the early 1990s to recruit and retain women workers and to be seen as addressing

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the barriers confronting women at work through social engagement and ethical investment.[92]

Whereas in 1981 NatWest was exceptional among commercial employers in Britain in seeking to address the issue of women's, and in particular mother's careers, by 1991, businesses in a range of major industries came under significant pressure to do so. By the time Opportunity 2000 launched in 1991, it had attracted sixty-one employers as members, including most of Britain's largest banks, numerous supermarket and retail chains, and a number of petroleum, media, and government organizations.[93] Each employer that joined Opportunity 2000 paid a fee of £1,000 and signed on to the campaign's agenda—to "encourage companies to maximize the potential of women in the workforce"—in the lead up to the year 2000. Beginning in 1995, Opportunity 2000, like the renamed Parents at Work, hosted annual award dinners with prizes and, implicitly, positive publicity for employers who demonstrated the most ambitious progress. Unlike Parents at Work, however, Opportunity 2000 did not issue awards for working mothers or working parents, nor did it highlight the labor of childcare workers.

Instead, Opportunity 2000 focused squarely on business aims and outcomes. While the campaign's members claimed to be addressing the needs of women workers, in practice their agenda for change was significantly paired down from the aims of feminist activists campaigning for support for working parents in the late 1970s. At Sainsbury's, participation in Opportunity 2000 meant ensuring "that the company takes full advantage of the potential of the women in its workforce, spurring talented women to climb the management ladder, encouraging the retention of those in higher level jobs, and demonstrating its dedication to equal opportunities."[94] References to women at the bottom, or to men's roles in supporting these changes, were nowhere to be found. In the 1990s, it was increasingly big businesses, and the organizations such as Business in the Community that supported their relationship to communities, that set the terms of public discussion surrounding women's careers and "working parents" well beyond the workplace.

In the early 1990s, Opportunity 2000 did facilitate new commitments from a growing array of British companies to address the concerns of working parents. A year into its life, the campaign boasted 150 member organizations, covering 23 percent of the UK workforce.[95] By the second year anniversary of the campaign's launch, Opportunity 2000 proudly reported

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on the work of its member organizations: 83 percent of its members offered job sharing to some staff compared to only 54 percent at launch, 60 percent offered maternity packages better than the statutory minimum, and 67 percent provided paternity leave for which there was no legal requirement.[96] Boots reported that one in three women employees now returned to work following maternity leave, compared to just 7 percent in 1990.

Moreover, at Midland Bank, retention rates after maternity leave increased from 29 percent in the early 1980s to around 80 percent in 1995. After introducing a job-sharing scheme and flexible working practices, Barclay's had likewise seen its maternity return rate double to almost 80 percent in a period of four years.[97] Since the launch of Opportunity 2000, Sainsbury's had managed to increase the percentage of women in middle management from 15 to 20 percent and had introduced a new childcare voucher scheme for parents.[98] In 1993 the supermarket chain also announced plans to fund the preparation of a new guide to childcare by the single parents charity Gingerbread, thereby growing the links between companies and charities engaged with the concerns of working parents.[99] In the early 1990s, even the pioneering NatWest experienced pressure to increase their efforts. The bank extended some of their existing programs to a broader array of employees.[100]

Despite some indications of progress, however, in individual organizations the pace of change was slow. Even at the time, commentators were quick to point out the gap between the campaign's glossy publicity and reality. A December 1992 piece published in *The Independent* to coincide with the release of Opportunity 2000's first year report noted that the campaign's members had "failed to communicate its objectives to staff, and only a quarter of them have allocated a budget for achieving published goals."[101] In practice, the family-friendly policies that emerged under the auspices of Opportunity 2000 were mostly about providing advice and less often actual assistance to individual, generally managerial employees who corresponded with the image of the white middle-class dual-income family. Only very rarely did they offer more expensive, genuinely collective solutions such as on-site childcare for all staff members—though when they did do so, the effects of these policies were undoubtedly transformative.[102] In 1994, more than 54 percent of working parents continued to rely on informal childcare arrangements involving family and friends—the kinds of arrangements most likely to break down on short notice, leaving

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parents without reliable options for childcare while they worked.[103] In lieu of providing comprehensive childcare, employers more often simply sanctioned the existing self-help culture among their staff. At companies such as NatWest, Shell UK, and GlaxoSmithKline, this meant enthusiastic corporate sponsorship of new staff-led working parents support groups.[104] It was certainly more cost-effective to channel staff into a flourishing therapeutic culture of self-help and mutual support than to address the underlying socioeconomic issues confronting workers.

Beginning in the late 1980s, numerous companies also embraced information provision as a low-cost form of support for staff. This was the case even in organizations that also provided significant material support to working parents; by the early 1990s, Midland Bank was both the leader in commercial sector workplace nursery provision in Britain and among the most enthusiastic providers of voluminous self-help literature for employees. In this literature, Midland and other organizations lauded the benefits of rigorously well-managed and balanced lives. A guide entitled "Checks & Balances: A Busy Woman's Guide to Managing Home and Work" published by Midland Bank characteristically asked readers to evaluate "are you getting the balance right? To determine your state of balance at present, tick the boxes next to the statements that seem to apply to you." The quiz was followed by a list of possible people to turn to for support. These included colleagues and friends but made no mention of employers. Being a successful working parent, Midland suggested, was a matter of individual determination and fortitude, not employer concessions.

Where Opportunity 2000 was successful was largely in achieving business aims rather than serving the needs of employees. The experiences of staff who sought to make use of new family-friendly policies point to their limitations within a workplace culture that continued to equate success with total commitment and self-sufficiency. This, of course, did not stop men and women from trying to take advantage of new policies—but it could feel risky to do so. In a 1992 episode of ITV's *The Time, The Place*, a mother who worked as a bank manager noted that while her organization had excellent official policies for working parents, "the individuals within the organizations don't always reflect that policy." She went on to say that when she had her baby, she was officially congratulated but was aware that a "drip drip whispering campaign started." In her experience, the bank had been happy to "put a guilt onto you that you don't feel."[105]

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Men who sought to make use of new policies also experienced challenges. According to a letter submitted to the WMA in 1992, Richard Taylor and his wife applied to job share as probation officers in Leicester when they were expecting their first baby. They benefited from a relatively long history and awareness of job sharing among probation officers.[106] Nonetheless, according to Mrs. Taylor, "the transition for Richard was not an easy one. . . . He found his path quite lonely to begin with and it took considerable courage." This, Mrs. Taylor explained, meant not only a willingness to grapple with giving up the traditional male role but also "knowing that he was risking excellent career prospects."[107] So long as workers felt they risked their employment status by availing themselves of the family-friendly policies ostensibly available for their support, the effects of these policies were limited.

Parents' experiences of a gap between policy and practice appear to have been widespread. At a July 1991 meeting of the NatWest Working Parents Association, which featured a Q&A session with personnel managers, one man told the assembled group "As a Manager applying for a 3 month unpaid paternity leave, I found the attitude of Senior Management a problem." The personnel team in attendance cautioned patience, noting that "attitudes are beginning to change." Other attendees complained about an absence of adequate information about new policies and problems with finding posts for maternity returners.[108] Of course, few organizations had done as much to change employment policies as NatWest. As one mother who wrote to PAW in the early 1990s pointed out, the concept of workplace support for parents remained for most "just a faraway dream."[109] Only a fraction of Britain's workforce worked for the large employers pioneering new family policy, and many of those who did nonetheless did not have access to the benefits devised with senior employees in mind.

The reach and success of new corporate family policies aside, by 1992 there were also emerging doubts about the very durability of these forms of support in the context of a new recession.[110] Opportunity 2000 continued to express optimism. It believed that despite the recession, the demographic predictions of the late 1980s were likely to be borne out in the 1990s.[111] As it happened, the recession had little long-term impact.[112] Commercial employers continued to implement policies where costs could be kept low, as they had from the beginning, and then traded on the publicity that this afforded them.[113] In the early 1990s, it cost companies little to

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pay lip service to the needs of women workers, and fewer and fewer leading businesses were prepared to publicly dissent from a vision of family friendliness at work. Moreover, while corporate employers were less concerned with retention and recruitment, new concerns about downsizing and the ongoing need to developing highly productive, loyal employees gave new impetus to policies ostensibly aimed at supporting staff.[114] In short, despite another wave of economic change, the logic of human capital investment endured.

While feminist activists, charities, and their union allies continued to talk about the unique needs of women workers and to evoke the figure of the working parent in the late 1980s and early 1990s, major companies, too, now claimed to speak for working parents. Increasingly, they shaped the direction of the national conversation. There are few better illustrations of this shift than the way in which unions began to play lip service to the business case. Unions had played an important role in supporting equal opportunities policy in the public, and to a lesser extent in the private sector, but increasingly they, too, were inclined to a pragmatic acceptance of business logic.[115] In 1995, the Civil and Public Services Association—a public sector union representing civil servants—published a pamphlet offering guidance on how to campaign for childcare support. It noted that "in order to successfully campaign for childcare, you need to prove that it offers value for money" and emphasized the importance of showing that "childcare is a sound investment."[116] Union activists in Camden Council a decade earlier had no doubt claimed that what was good for workers would be good for the council—but it had been equality and fairness, rather than the logic of investment, that served as a rationale. In the early 1990s, even while growing numbers of organizations implemented family-friendly policies, the pace of progressive change stagnated.

IV. PUBLIC–PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS AND A NEW NATIONAL AGENDA FOR WORKING PARENTS

The rise of the business case and the emergence of family-friendly corporate workplaces on a more widespread scale in Britain by the early 1990s paved the way for the development of surprising new partnerships. As women's workforce participation continued to increase alongside the rise of single parent families, the need for childcare and flexible working options for

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parents became more pressing than ever.[117] By 1993, so concerned were a subset of Opportunity 2000 members about maintaining a competitive workforce that they came together to found Employers for Childcare, a business-led campaign for a national childcare policy.[118] Increasingly during the early 1990s, the needs of cash-strapped feminist charities, struggling local government authorities, and floundering unions determined to make some improvement, however incremental, to the lot of working parents aligned with the needs of British employers. The effects of this meeting of interests were transformative. For the first time, working parents became the focus of elaborate collaborations on the national scale and set the stage for New Labour's leadership on family policy by the end of the 1990s. But it was now transnational business interests, rather than charities and activists, who drove new national collaborations.

In 1990, Business in the Community and Sainsbury's coauthored a new guide for employers interested in expanding local childcare provision in the communities where they were based. The guide promoted the development of public–private partnerships and cited several existing partnerships of the kind they envisioned. This included the example of the Automobile Association in Basingstoke, which had earlier that year transferred a member of its staff for six months to work with the local authority and voluntary organizations two days per week to develop childcare resources in the community. Foremost among the partnerships highlighted, however, was Childcare Links—a new childcare information center for parents based in Brighton.

The center was a one-stop shop for information on childcare options and a base for coordinating efforts to develop more childcare facilities locally. It was the outcome of collaboration between numerous stakeholders. At a national level, the Daycare Trust (DCT) was responsible for planning and orchestrating the project, with support from Business in the Community. Initial financial backing for the center came from American Express—an employer of approximately three thousand people in Brighton.[119] Childcare Links received operating funding and support from the Department of Health, the Brighton and East Sussex councils, and a consortium of local employers. For Business in the Community, the center was an exemplar of the kind of solution to the challenges faced by working parents likely to benefit all.

The Childcare Links resource center had its origins in 1988 when American Express conducted a survey of the work and home lives of its British

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employees. The survey emerged out of concerns about a loss of productivity due to employees' difficulty in finding childcare.[120] As had long been the case in the history of the working parent, business practice in the United States had an important influence on developments in Britain. From the early 1980s onward, the American Express Foundation had begun supporting childcare programs in the United States on the basis that affordable, reliable childcare for employees was critical to workplace productivity.[121] By 1988, the company was donating funds to seven national programs and twenty local organizations in seventeen US states. As a result of its survey of British staff, in 1988 American Express contacted the UK's most prominent childcare charity—the DCT. The charity's then director, Marion Kozak, traveled to the United States at the company's request, and in June of 1988, American Express granted the DCT £40,000 to conduct a feasibility study on the establishment of a childcare resource and referral network in Britain, with an initial center to be based in Brighton.[122] For American Express, the costs of funding the project were minimal compared to the expense of the company's ongoing staff recruitment and retention challenges.[123]

Despite some trepidation, the DCT set about designing a nationwide resource and referral network at American Express's behest. As we have seen, following the demise of the Greater London Council in 1986, members of the National Child Care Campaign (NCCC) had formed the DCT as a charitable arm of the movement for better and more childcare in Britain. Unlike the overtly political NCCC, the charity was eligible for a wide range of funding that could then support the aims, if not all of the activities, of the campaign wing. The DCT's spin off of the NCCC had been controversial, and as late as 1990, the bifurcation of organizational priorities into two arms was a live issue.[124]

In this context, the decision to accept major financial support from an American company was not taken lightly. Until 1989, most of the DCT's funding had come from the London Borough Grants Committee to provide a childcare information service in Greater London and to publish literature on childcare resources.[125] As the director of the still young DCT, Marion Kozak's perspective on the collaboration with American Express was mixed. On the one hand, she felt that "we should also look at what is happening in Europe with childcare, not just in the USA, or our reputation will become right wing." At the same time, however, she had been impressed by the fact that in the United States organizations seemed to be "united in their belief

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that the need for childcare services was urgent for obvious socio-economic reasons concerning women's need to work. This was not the situation in Britain where there was still a pretense that women could stay in the home to look after their children if they wanted to."[126] By 1990, the DCT was not the only feminist charity faced with such tensions. In November of that year the WMA agreed to partner with BP to set up a childcare information service for the company's employees.[127] Increasingly, corporations were hiring charities to orchestrate projects on a contract basis and shaping a new field of family-friendly consulting in the process. Ultimately, for the DCT, the collaboration with American Express was too good an offer to turn down.

In designing a new national resource and referral program at the behest of American Express, the DCT drew as much on local as on international models. Over the course of the 1980s, several local authorities including the London Borough of Wandsworth had set up childcare information services for parents.[128] Under the new Children Act passed in 1989, local authorities were officially required to review and maintain information about private childcare services available in their area for the first time.[129] For newly partnered charities and businesses, this presented an opportunity to draw on knowledge at the local level. For Britain's local authorities, it meant the potential for financial support in fulfilling a new set of obligations. By the autumn of 1990, the Brighton and East Sussex councils had joined with the DCT on the Childcare Links project. Across the country, other councils were beginning to express interest in similar partnerships.[130]

While the national government had long been resistant to devising a comprehensive childcare strategy, from the mid-1980s, there had been an emerging interest within the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) in precisely these kinds of public–private partnerships. In 1984, two officers from DHSS traveled to California where they visited a series of childcare resource and referral centers that operated on the county level, providing parents with names of local home-based daycare providers and sometimes offering parent education programs. They returned with a new enthusiasm for pilot schemes of this sort in Britain. By 1986, DHSS had funded a project proposed by the National Childminding Association for a childcare information service in Sheffield.[131] As was the case for multinational corporations like American Express, for the government, projects of this kind offered several advantages. First, they ostensibly supported

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the needs of working parents while being significantly lower cost than creating new childcare places. Second, they championed a local and self-help ethos in keeping with long-standing decentralized childcare practices in Britain.

If DHSS was unlikely to name these motivations publicly, companies were more than happy to do so. From the outset, Business in the Community had emphasized to employers that interest in the Childcare Links project "has come from the personnel departments, who see Childcare Links as providing a service to business and not as a community affairs project."[132] This was a striking admission for an organization ostensibly as committed to communities as to business interests. In 1992, American Express was pleased to report that the pilot referral and resource center in Brighton had "led to an improved image as a family friendly employer both by members of the public and the customers."[133] Whether it had benefited employees was unclear. Nonetheless, by the mid-1990s, a host of further centers like Childcare Links had been set up including in Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Middlesbrough, Newham, Walsall, and Wakefield.[134] Public–private partnerships spanning the corporate and charitable and sectors, and both local and national government, were now shaping the kinds of services available in communities on an unprecedented scale. These services, however, were highly limited in scope.

In a 1988 survey of recent developments in childcare assembled for the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), the economist Peter Mottershead could already foresee the disadvantages of growing enthusiasm for childcare information centers in the Childcare Links model. "If one of the problems about childcare is that there is not generally enough of it," he wrote, "then providing more information about an inadequate level of provision may not be seen as particularly helpful." He went on to point out that if "there is a coordinated, locally based, comprehensive system, then the need for information is reduced."[135] It was only in a free market system of diverse, uncoordinated childcare options that information for its own sake would prove essential. By the mid-1990s, that was precisely the system being built in Britain. A focus on information over services, championed by corporations and national government alike, and facilitated by struggling local government authorities and the charitable sector, did more than simply distribute costs. It set the stage for New Labour's emphasis on "worker citizens" and "hard working families." Citizens would be reimagined as consumers

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of services, and the national government, like corporations before it, would be able to embrace the needs of working parents on new terms.[136]

It was precisely because of the proliferation of new low-cost solutions to the problems confronting working parents, largely decontextualized from their feminist origins, and supported by a broad public–private consensus, that New Labour embraced the promise of support for working families.[137] In 1998, Tony Blair's government introduced the first ever national childcare strategy in Britain.[138] The agenda it set out was in some ways a meaningful departure from existing government policy. Beginning in late 1998, the government guaranteed a free nursery place for all four-year-olds for the first time. In practice, the significance of the guarantee was limited as it only provided for 12.5 hours per week of care during the school year.[139] Nonetheless, this represented a striking new government interest in the needs of middle-class parents.[140]

While New Labour committed to expanding state provision for all families up to a point, it also invested heavily in private childcare solutions and in a two-strata system that catered primarily to the lowest-income families.[141] In so doing, it envisioned the needs of predominately white middle-class professionals—a new demographic of concern for social policy makers—as distinct from those of working-class Britons. In the late 1990s, Blair's government expanded an existing Conservative childcare voucher scheme and introduced a system of tax credits to assist parents with purchasing childcare on the private market. As much as this represented social investment, it was also a way of shaping British parents—including middle-class parents—into capable and responsible investors and consumers equipped with the kinds of skills necessary in a new flexible economy and labor market.[142] New Labour's policies amounted to a significantly greater government involvement in supporting working families, but it was one that developed, rather than broke, from the stratified, market-oriented model of family policy that had been shaped by corporate practice from the late 1980s onward.

It was also strongly in keeping with the gender politics that had progressively separated demands for greater support for working parents from the feminist context in which they had first originated. As was the case with childcare, Blair's government set about tackling the issues of flexible work and leave as part of its commitment to reshaping family policy. In 2000, the government convened a taskforce of experts on the challenges facing

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working parents in the Department of Trade and Industry under ministers Margaret Hodge and Alan Johnson. The matter of what to call the new project was initially uncertain, and the ministers considered using the language of family friendliness before settling on a newer term: work–life balance.

Pam Walton of New Ways to Work was invited to sit on the project's advisory board and remembers that it was ultimately the broadness of balance that earned it favor over a focus on family; work–life issues were of concern to caregivers, those with disabilities, and indeed anyone with interests or commitments outside of work, not just parents. In emphasizing balance, the government was in tune with public attitudes—just two years later, a study would find that the desire for flexible work options was nearly as high among nonparents as parents.[143] Moreover, there were now voices in the media, in social policy, and in the charitable sector calling for a greater acknowledgment of men's experiences of and involvement in both parenting and paid work.[144] For Walton, too, the focus on work–life balance was appealing—it seemed to harken back to the sensitivity of equal opportunities policy to the wide variety of different social positions and needs of workers. It also distanced itself from the right's emphasis on "family values" and refused to represent the problem of work as a concern only for women or for traditional, nuclear families. Under the auspices of the Work–Life Balance Challenge Fund, the government provided grants to employers that wished to implement work–life balance practices and policies. This new attention to the working lives of parents was a development, Walton remembers, that "you could only have dreamt of in the early '80s."[145]

However, it was also a departure from a rhetorical framework that emphasized the relationship between employment practice and women's rights. The private sector had long since benefited from distancing the question of workplace policy from what might appear to be overtly feminist policies and shifting responsibility for managing to combine work and family responsibilities back onto employees while taking credit for policy change. As much as an emphasis on work–life concerns could address itself to challenges facing a wide variety of workers, it could also obscure the persistent gendered division of labor both in paid work and at home.[146] Already in the early 2000s, social policy makers had begun to express skepticism about the emphasis on work–life balance over the concerns of parents and families. In a 2003 discussion about work–life balance on BBC Radio, Richard Reeves, the director of the think tank Demos, insisted that there was simply no

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comparison between working parents and people who wanted time away from work to go and take a class—childrearing, in his mind, was a different and more important kind of social activity. For Reeves, there was a danger that talking about work–life balance as a concern for everyone would dilute the idea's force.[147]

In their 2001 "Essential Guide to Work Life Balance," which was addressed to both individuals and employers, the Department of Trade and Industry admitted that "work life balance isn't necessarily about working less. It's about having control and flexibility over when, where, and how you work."[148] The advice that followed—"it's about working smart" and "juggle don't struggle"—ultimately contributed to the notion that not only could Britons achieve more control over their lives but they in fact had to. Whether parenting was a matter of work, leisure, or both hardly mattered as the distance between work and "life" narrowed in both the work culture and political culture of the early twenty-first century. New Labour's contribution to the history of working parenthood in Britain was ultimately a footnote to its profound reinvention at the hands of the private sector.

V. CONCLUSION

In October 1979, A. A. Anderson, a regional personnel manager at NatWest Bank, penned a letter to a former employee who had left the bank upon the birth of her child. He was now inviting her to return to NatWest as part of a new trial maternity returners scheme: "Since the time when you left employment with the Bank, there has been a steady change of attitude towards career development of lady staff throughout commerce and industry. I suppose it is true that everything is relative and, whilst some believe that the change has been rapid, others feel that it has been slower than we would have hoped."[149] In 1979, when Anderson wrote, British industry had done little to address the challenges confronting "lady staff" with caring responsibilities. While the decade that followed saw a dramatic rewriting of corporate policy with regards to women's careers and the concerns of working parents, there was no more certainty in 1989 than there had been a decade previously about the pace of progress.

Over the course of the 1980s, employers were motivated to introduce family-friendly policies by a new business case. This was shaped at the intersection of feminist activism and corporate concerns about investment

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in human capital and profits, in the context of a new transnational legal and political framework supporting women's rights. Under greater pressure to compete for skilled labor and for staff and customer loyalty, Britain's largest companies instituted job sharing, reentry schemes, and, to a limited extent, new forms of childcare support. There is no doubt that these resources and opportunities were available to far more British workers by the early 1990s than had been the case just a decade previously. At Midland Bank alone, in the mid-1990s, over one thousand employees were employed in job shares.[150] In the 1990s, the private sector's innovations profoundly restructured the national conversation about the problem of the working parent and shaped a political context that made possible the expansion of government support for working families. Nonetheless, as we have seen, the policies implemented by many of Britain's largest employers and the vision underscoring them was highly limited in scope.

These limitations were not merely financial. Instead, they reflected the corporate sector's distinct vision and values. New employment policies designed to support working parents were devised with white middle-class, dual-income households in mind, and as such, they frequently overlooked unskilled and low-wage workers and single parents. At times these exclusions were inscribed in policies that applied to only some, generally high-level employees. New policies and programs instituted from the top down frequently suffered from the lack of a corresponding shift in managerial culture to support their implementation. And of course, new family-friendly policies were only instituted on a wide scale by some, generally large employers in female-dominated industries like banking.

Despite the centrality of feminist activism to the advent of family-friendly policies, the schemes implemented in British companies from the mid-1980s to early 1990s omitted broad swaths of the feminist politics from which concerns about the barriers facing working parents had first emerged. Beginning in the late 1970s, progressive public sector employers had invoked the figure of the working parent to challenge the assumption that women were necessarily primary caregivers within families, and to encourage men, too, to share in household responsibilities. For Britain's most influential private sector employers, talk of working parents generally accomplished the very opposite; it became a way of distancing employment practice from an overtly feminist agenda. Until the mid-1990s, men were rarely considered seriously in either the shaping or application of new

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corporate policies on behalf of working parents. Furthermore, new policies tended to position family—always only one of several alternative spheres from work initially imagined by feminists—as the raison d'être for remaking corporate policy. On the whole, the kinds of structural critiques of women's social position and visions of liberation that came out of the WLM found little reception in the corporate world.

In part, this was a result of the fact that feminists working both within and outside of companies to change corporate practice approached the problem on a piecemeal basis with the aim of making incremental change. In the process, they tended to prioritize the interests of the professional mothers for whom they could most readily motivate corporate interest. The compromises made by feminists in the commercial world of the mid-1980s ultimately drew them closer to the agendas of corporations. Feminists' willingness to engage in these compromises no doubt stemmed from the growing professionalization of educated, middle-class women in this period; many of those who were most influential in shaping family-friendly policies themselves built successful careers in the new field that they helped to create. In her work on the public sector, Janet Newman has noted that the rise of an emphasis on soft "people skills" in the management of organization life created new opportunities for women's agency.[151] This was certainly the case for some women in the private sector, particularly with the rise of human resources management as a new, American-imported approach to conceptualizing personnel issues in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[152]

It is worth pausing to note that the version of support for working parents shaped by the largely corporate members of organizations like Opportunity 2000, and the politics underscoring them, though incredibly influential, were not the only efforts to make change in the private sector in this period. As early as 1980, a number of companies—generally small organizations with high numbers of female staff—also devised new policies to support parents at work. Their innovation reflected organizational culture and values distinct from those of Britain's corporations. In 1995, *Time Out* magazine documented its family-friendly policies in an application for PAW's Employer of the Year award. *Time Out*, which by 1995 had eighty-eight staff, half of them women, had first introduced parental leave for all employees in 1980. Its policy included six months of maternity leave and four weeks of paternity leave on full pay, plus fifteen paid days per year

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available to all staff irrespective of gender to care for a sick family member. In addition, the company offered a childcare allowance to staff with children under fourteen, plus an additional childcare allowance for employees who worked evenings.

According to *Time Out*, the motivation for introducing generous maternity and paternity leave policies was to "give women enough time to spend with their babies" and "to give fathers the opportunity to look after their babies."[153] *Time Out*'s policies appear to have been used by both men and women, including at the senior level. Though the magazine was almost certainly more concerned with staff recruitment and loyalty than its submission reflects, companies that applied for PAW's awards were generally very upfront about their interest in "investing" in staff and remaining competitive with other organizations in terms of HR policy.[154] *Time Out* was one of several companies pioneering family-friendly policy in the commercial sector with broader social as much as financial aims in mind. Its history points to the uneven and at times hopeful legacies of feminist activism even in the context of an emerging hegemonic approach to working parenthood in Britain.

Organizations such as *Time Out* were, of course, in the minority. For the most part, changes in employment practice in Britain in the name of working parents fell short of radically rethinking or transforming the experiences of women and men. Nonetheless, the new status quo in Britain's largest companies recalibrated aspects of the relationship between employers and employees with long-term consequences for work culture. In addition to the specific agenda of support for working families, feminists concerned with the needs of working mothers from the late 1970s onward had advocated more generally for a transformation of the relationship between employers and employees. As Kate Allen, the head of Camden's women's committee noted in 1983, "it's not just about making sure that people can job share if they want to, it's about changing the expectations of the Council as employers and about making Camden as an employer aware of what women have to offer."[155] By the late 1980s, British corporations were well aware of the labor that mothers had to offer. Now that employers had an interest in helping workers reconcile their caring responsibilities with paid employment, these became, for the first time, subjects of officially sanctioned workplace discussion in boardrooms as well as in working parents groups. One indirect and enduring consequence of feminist activism in the

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private sector, then, was the emergence of new spaces for talking about the concerns of family life at work.

What followed from the new presence of family at work was not a set of innovations that could shift the division of labor so much as the birth of a new affective culture. Suddenly, work was a place for feelings. In 1996, research by BT Forum found that 61 percent of Britons felt unable to talk about home issues at work.[156] This points no doubt to the limitations of the changes that I have described both in terms of organizational scope and the stratification of the workforce. Nonetheless, the fact that the question was posed at all betrays the seismic shift in workplace culture that had transpired in less than two decades. It is no coincidence that the early 1990s saw the growth of employee assistance programs and other counseling resources as employment benefits in British organizations. Organizations, particularly large companies, increasingly appointed workplace counselors and caregiver groups. Beyond providing a room at lunchtime, the costs were extremely low.[157]

By the turn of the twenty-first century, these kinds of benefits had all but displaced the types of policies initially envisioned for the support of working parents. In 2003, an EOC study found that less that 10 percent of working fathers had access to a crèche, subsidized nursery place, or financial help with childcare in any form. Only one in six had received information about local childcare provision from their employer. By contrast, more than half of fathers had access to workplace counseling or stress management advice.[158]

The emergence of a new affective culture in the workplace in Britain in the early 1990s had parallels across the Atlantic. In her 1997 classic *The Time Bind*, sociologist Arlie Hochschild asked why employees were not taking advantage of the new family-friendly policies emerging in American corporate workplaces in large numbers. She concluded that by the 1990s, the roles of work and home had reversed—work had begun to offer a sense of community and belonging for employees while at the same time the home had become regimented and demanding. Hochschild suggested that workers now felt more appreciated, more emotionally supported, and more relaxed at work than at home. In the British context, and even the American, perhaps it was less a reversal of the roles of work and home than a merging in the qualities of the two that characterized the remade work culture of this period. In the 1990s work as much as home became a site

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of new anxieties—as the decade's buzzword of "stress" and mounting concern about "long hours culture" suggest. Moreover, family-friendly policies tended to reify both work and home as sites of relentless, competing demands. Whereas feminists had called for support for working parents to liberate women and men both at work and at home, corporate policies that implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, targeted women lacked any vision of selfhood or community for women, or indeed men, beyond the realms of work or home. Of course, they often lacked reference to working-class families all together. Perhaps, then, the ultimate failure of new corporate policies was to offer something that felt like real help.

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5 BECOMING A WORKING PARENT: LABOR INTENSIFICATION AND THE PURSUIT OF "HAVING IT ALL"

In July 1992, D. J. Wilson wrote in to *SHE* magazine to nominate his thirty-two-year-old wife, Kim Wilson, for the Working Mothers Association's (WMA) Working Mother of the Year award. In his submission to the competition, run by the WMA and sponsored by *SHE*, Mr. Wilson described Mrs. Wilson's life as a working mother.[1] The Wilson family lived in Swindon, Wiltshire, where Mrs. Wilson was mother to three children—a ten-year-old son and two-year-old twin boys. She also held two jobs as a key-to-disk operator—one for the building society Nationwide, which she did mornings from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., and another for *Reader's Digest* magazine, which she did from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.[2] Mrs. Wilson had recently taken the morning job in addition to her evening one to supplement the family's income. The couple employed a nanny to look after the children in the evenings since Mr. Wilson also worked full time in afternoons and evenings as well as overtime on Saturdays "out of financial necessity."

This arrangement enabled him to take care of the toddlers in the morning and to do some of the housework, but he was quick to report that "Kim still has a fair amount of work to do when she's not at her paid employment. The work she does at home is her unpaid employment!!" This included, among other things, doing the weekly shopping at the weekend with the three children in tow—"which is difficult enough when both parents are present." He went on to tell the award committee that although "She does get tired . . . she hardly ever complains. I really wonder sometimes how she keeps going." He hinted, though that despite her good nature, Mrs. Wilson's conflicting responsibilities came at an emotional cost: "She is an

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exceedingly good mother—although she feels guilty about being at work so much." After recounting the minutia of the family's day-to-day schedule, Mr. Wilson concluded on a note of exasperation—"WHO SAID LIFE ISN'T WONDERFUL??" before emphasizing that it was impossible to imagine how Mrs. Wilson could not win the award.

As it turned out, she was shortlisted. When she was invited to write to the WMA about her experience, she spoke about her efforts to ensure that the limited time she had with her family felt like "quality time." She also offered a brief account of her professional history. After leaving school, she had started work as an office junior in a sales office and had worked her way up to sales administrator by the time her first son was born. When she returned to work after the birth of her twins, she intentionally sought out a job "which did not hold too much responsibility, as I knew it would be hard bringing up two small babies while working." Mrs. Wilson nonetheless expressed the hope that as the children got older, she would find a more interesting and challenging position "while still maintaining the balance of being a working woman and a devoted mother."[3]

The account that Mr. Wilson wove about his wife for the benefit of the WMA's award judges was a story about the heroics of everyday life. While the tone was upbeat, and its emphasis necessarily on the workability of the household's day-to-day, it was also an account of survival against the odds—one that frequently tipped into the realm of disbelief. The letter ultimately had less to say about Mrs. Wilson's specific personal attributes than it did about the sheer relentlessness of her day, where work of one sort or another was waiting around every corner. The letter revealed that work, both paid and domestic, was unremitting for Mr. Wilson, too. In her letter, Mrs. Wilson emphasized her efforts to excel—as a mother committed to giving attention to each of family members, as a worker who intended to do stimulating work, and as a woman determined in her efforts to take a weekly Sunday night bath.

In their letters to the WMA's judges, the Wilsons drew on and developed a genre that had taken shape as a widespread popular discourse about working parents in Britain. By the 1990s, representations of successful, white middle-class working mothers and fathers multiplied in popular culture as never before. From the early 1980s onward, stories about the growth of mothers' paid work, job-sharing couples, and changing family structures had appeared in print, radio, and TV journalism. The 1990s saw burgeoning

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interest in these themes as well as a new media focus on "family-friendly" business and on fatherhood. While feminists had always understood "having it all" as a contradiction, the 1990s saw rising interest in both the promise and pitfalls of the notion.[4] The new genre of confessional journalism that emerged in the 1990s breathed life into these stories and highlighted the ordinary experiences of Britons in the mass media.[5] The 1990s also saw the rise of self-help literature directed at working parents, ranging from profit-making publications to government manuals and corporate HR literature. By 1993, there were more than ten times as many mentions of working parents and working parenthood in published English language books than had been the case just two decades earlier.[6]

In the case of *SHE*, growing popular interest in the figure of the working parent and a booming market for advice for this demographic proved the impetus for the magazine's reinvention in 1990. Under the new editorial leadership of Linda Kelsey, formerly at *Cosmo*, *SHE* billed itself as a "grown up *Cosmo*"—a glossy monthly aimed at working women with children.[7] Its tagline "a great balance for modern women" hinted at the dual lives of its readers. In her letter to *SHE*, Mrs. Wilson wrote, with a note of humor, that Mr. Wilson was "an avid reader" of the magazine. Devotees of women's magazines or not, the Wilsons were both immersed in the now widespread language of working parenthood and eager to make sense of their lives and aspirations in those terms.

This chapter considers why a demographic of Britons that extended well beyond the ranks of feminist activists embraced the language of working parenthood, and the forms of self-improvement that attended it, in the 1990s. On the one hand, the Wilsons' letters, and dozens more like them, spoke to the tremendous reach of second-wave feminism's message. This included the aim of calling work what is work. Mr. Wilson was quick to name Mrs. Wilson's domestic responsibilities as "her unpaid employment." It included, moreover, the message that mothers could aspire to the interesting and challenging work Mrs. Wilson imagined that she would take on as her sons grew older. At the same time, the language of working parenthood that the Wilsons invoked reflected the costs of a world in which work and the trade-offs it required now seemed omnipresent: exhaustion, stress, and guilt. Alongside the work of paid employment and the work of home and family, the Wilsons' letters point to the heightened forms of self-work that accompanied the rise to cultural prominence of the working parent

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in the 1990s. Middle- and aspirationally middle-class parents—particularly but not exclusively mothers—faced a barrage of novel expectations to compound their to-do lists. These included the imperative to achieve equally at work and at home, to attain "balance" through emotional self-regulation and self-care, and, implicitly, to be fully self-reliant, if not as individuals, then certainly as households.

That a growing number of Britons embraced the notion of working parenthood in this context seems at first thought paradoxical. It was, of course, the case that ever-increasing numbers of British parents in the 1990s were, in fact, working parents. Across the board, among two-parent families, 57 percent were dual-wage-earning households by 1989. Despite the greater barriers to participation in paid work for single parents, in 1989, 41 percent of single mothers were also in paid employment.[8] And yet, for a variety of reasons, the language of working parenthood might well have rung hollow. As we have seen, in the late 1980s, British corporations had begun to speak to the needs of working parents and to institute family-friendly policies. To a degree, the national government followed suit. By the 1990s, however, it was becoming clear that in practice neither British corporations nor the national government were delivering on the needs of more than a small minority of working families.[9] In fact, their policies and programs largely served to reinforce the notion that managing workloads, both paid and unpaid, was a question of personal responsibility. Moreover, these policies failed to deliver at precisely the moment when, as we will see, the workloads confronting British families intensified.

It was also the case that the idea of the working parent remained strongly associated with the demographic of predominately white middle-class women who had first advocated for greater support for workers with caring responsibilities in the women's liberation movement (WLM) of the 1970s. Working-class and ethnic minority Britons, single parents, and men from a wide variety of backgrounds experienced their lives as workers and family members differently from the married white middle-class women around whom notions of working parenthood were now, most often, shaped. Nevertheless, in the 1990s, growing numbers of Britons—including working as well as middle-class men and women far removed from metropolitan feminist networks—came to identify as working parents and to speak about their lives in these terms. A new aspirational culture developed around the figure of the working parent that, to an extent, cut across boundaries of

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gender, class, and marital status, though less so race. This chapter explores that culture and returns to the questions of everyday life and the gendered division of labor with which this book began.

I. A NEW CULTURAL ICON

In the 1990s, the working parent became a cultural icon.[10] To understand why a growing demographic of Britons came to think of themselves as working parents, we must first turn to the proliferation of representations of working parents in British popular culture. As we have seen, by the mid-1980s, the figure of the working parent was evoked across the political spectrum in Britain and with a range of different aims. In the 1990s, feminist charities including New Ways to Work (NWW), the WMA (Parents at Work from 1994 onward), and the Daycare Trust (DCT) called for support on behalf of working parents, instead of working mothers, in the hopes of drawing attention to men's roles as parents and shifting the gendered division of labor. At the same time, they increasingly found that a focus on parents rather than mothers helped them to appeal to corporations and to a state that wished to encourage women's workforce participation while distancing themselves from overtly feminist policies or committing to large expenditures on behalf of families.

In the mid-1990s, organizations such as NWW drew attention to working fathers on a sustained basis for the first time. In 1995, the recently renamed Parents at Work launched a long hours campaign to highlight the conditions of men's work and the consequences of intensifying work culture for family life in Britain.[11] By highlighting the strains on fathers and suggesting that they wished to share more fully in childrearing, the charitable sector made a case that men as much as women needed work benefits such as flexible hours and leave arrangements and access to reliable high-quality childcare. Meanwhile, as working parenthood became a reality for growing numbers of middle-class Britons in the absence of comprehensive forms of state or employer support, working parents also became a major market. If this was a market still overwhelmingly geared toward women, men, too, were targeted by booming private childcare, domestic services, and advice industries.

Amid the profusion of representations of working parents, there was a shared quality to many of the depictions of working parenthood that

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circulated in British popular culture. In the 1990s, working parent success stories became a common trope of both journalism and advice literature, albeit in different forms. The popularity of working parent success stories reflects the emergence of shared interests—both political and commercial—in making working parenthood seem manageable and desirable. In the 1990s, the now influential feminist charities that had first popularized the notion of working parenthood were eager to suggest that good lives for working parents were possible, even as they demanded more state and employer support to make this a reality. This dual emphasis on the promise and challenges of working parenthood was taken up in self-help manuals and in women's and parenting magazines, which sought to profit from audiences' wide-ranging hopes and fears about working parenthood. Corporations, whose financial interests now depended upon keeping skilled women in the workforce, were likewise more than happy to emphasize the manageability of combining work and family life in the HR materials they disseminated to their staff.

In some instances, the shared quality of representations of working parents across these diverse media reflected their common origins. To take one example, in 1995, *Practical Parenting* magazine published a long-form article entitled "We Can Work It Out" that featured guidelines on "how to make life as a working parent easier."[12] Although the article was clearly aimed at women readers and adopted all of the style of a women's magazine advice column, it referenced working parents throughout and noted the importance of fathers sharing in household responsibilities. A footnote revealed that the piece had been adapted from another text: the *Working Parents Survival Handbook*, released the same year by the Department of Health's education authority.

The *Working Parents Survival Handbook* was an over two-hundred-page official guide to all aspects of working parenthood addressed to both men and women.[13] The government handbook, in turn, had been written with support from the DCT, the Maternity Alliance, Parents at Work (PAW), and the National Childbirth Trust. The emergence of feminist charities as expert consultants on the subject of working parents in the 1990s exerted an important influence on the images and ideas about working mothers and fathers in wider circulation. This was all the more so given the increasingly strong links among feminist professionals working in the charitable sector, government, business, and media by the 1990s. Not all, or even many, of

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the depictions of working parents in British popular culture represented the highest aims of feminist activists. On the contrary, they were at best a reflection of the uneasy accommodation of feminist interests with government and business that we have explored in the previous chapters.

In practice, most representations of working parents in Britain in the 1990s remained depictions of mothers. It is easy to read newspaper and magazine articles, television and radio programs, and advice literature for their collapsing of parenthood and motherhood and for their default assumption that mothers were the managers of their households. It is more interesting, however, to consider what had in fact shifted over the course of the 1980s. These sources point to new notions about fatherhood as well as to new ideas about working motherhood. In particular, they make clear that the working mother—a vilified figure in the postwar period—was by the 1990s no longer exclusively suspect. Indeed, working motherhood took on a glossy, aspirational air even as it continued to be associated with guilt and increasingly also with stress and overwork. In the 1990s, the dual-income household represented by professional working mothers and working fathers, both engaged in the lives of their families, replaced the male-breadwinner family as the predominate vision of the successful middle-class family.

SUCCESS STORIES

In the 1990s, the success story became a pervasive way of addressing the phenomenon of working parenthood everywhere from women's magazines and newspaper articles to government and corporate manuals. Featuring individuals' stories of navigating day-to-day life as working parents—at times in their own words—lent commentators an easy air of credibility as they addressed Britons' everyday realities. Most often, these success stories suggested that workable solutions to combining work and family life were possible with enough effort and imagination. The true promise of working parenthodd, however, varied widely. The popularity of working parent success stories is therefore a testament to the genre's political and cultural flexibility.

In some instances, the working parent success stories that appeared in the British media spoke to 1970s feminism's most expansive ideals. In the late 1980s and in the 1990s, job-sharing couples were frequently featured in the press in spite of the fact that they represented a small minority of all job

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sharers and despite the tiny numbers of total job sharers in the labor market. Stories about pairs of lecturers, vicars, social workers, police officers, and others who had worked together to find a way to remain in paid work and to share the work of childrearing at home posited a vision of egalitarian, genderless households where children were raised equally by both parents and where no parent would have to experience routine alienation from the other's day-to-day life.[14] These highly favorable accounts delivered on the original promise of working parenthood to liberate women to participate fully in professional life and to see men assume a greater share of household and childrearing responsibilities.

Meanwhile, in the success stories that proliferated in British media in the 1990s, the promise of working parenthood was often couched in assurances that the dual-income household would not upend traditional gender norms. When *Practical Parenting* magazine published its excerpt from the Department of Health's *Working Parents Survival Handbook*, six photos accompanied the piece (figures 5.1–5.3). Five of these depicted women working, caring for small children, or both. The mothers shown were slender, smiling, white, and middle-class professionals. They appeared alongside computers, taking calls, and dressed and made up for a day at the office. Their children, too, were smiling, well groomed, and manifestly well cared for.

The images suggested the possibility of a frictionless world in which middle-class mothers, now working, nonetheless displayed the competence, ease, and attractiveness of the housewife. Just one image included a father in a scene featuring a family of four enjoying a leisurely breakfast in matching bathrobes. Though certainly a less central part of the picture, the working father, too, was a jovial participant in the life of home and family. The accompanying piece urged readers to believe that professional fulfillment, happy children, and the evident material success of two household incomes were possible without risking traditionally feminine success and a conventional family life. Whether or not working parenthood was portrayed as a challenge to traditional gender norms, success stories told of couples achieving household harmony.

As much as working parent success stories addressed working parenthood's ability to deliver both emotional and material fulfillment, they also acknowledged the immense strain confronting working families. For every account of elegantly resolving the tensions of work and home life came one

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BACK TO WORK SPECIAL
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Whether you're already back at work after your baby's birth, or undecided about what to do, we suggest ways to make life as a working parent easier and how to manage your time so there's enough for everyone – including you!
At-a-glance guide
Making your decision.....page 76
Alternatives to full-time work.....page 76
Back to work checklist.....page 77
Crises and contingency plans.....page 78
Juggling your time.....page 78
Childcare at a glance.....page 82
EXTRACT FROM WORKING PARENTS' SURVIVAL HANDBOOK BY LEE RODWELL AND MARY TIDYMAN (HEALTH EDUCATION AUTHORITY, £6.99)

FIGURE 5.1
We Can Work It Out. Courtesy of The Women's Library.

that emphasized accumulated fatigue and stress. In this respect, the 1990s saw the exaggeration of an existing tendency in representations of working parents. Since the late 1970s, when the notion of working parenthood was first elaborated in feminist circles, working parents were portrayed both as hopeful and frustrated figures, burdened with significant responsibility and inadequate support. In the 1990s, the pitfalls of aiming to have it all were dramatized on a new scale. Helen McCarthy has suggested that during the 1980s and 1990s, a new pessimism emerged in popular culture about the possibilities of combining a satisfying professional and family life for

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FIGURE 5.2
Taking Calls. Courtesy of The Women's Library.

FIGURE 5.3
Family Breakfast. Courtesy of The Women's Library.

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women.[15] Yet the 1990s also saw renewed excitement about the promise of combining paid work with family. Working parents were depicted both as hollowed out and exhausted and as highly accomplished middle-class success stories.

More often than not, these accounts were one and the same. Jenny Ireland, mother of two-year-old Charlie, was featured in a piece entitled "Mums at Work" in *Our Baby* magazine as evidence that "it is possible to combine working life with being a parent and enjoy the two!" She nonetheless told readers of Charlie's experience at nursery, "We're happy with the arrangement, although part of me does worry about him, especially on the odd days when he cries as I leave." She concluded her commentary by noting that "working full time and having a young child is very demanding and tiring."[16] In other forums, talk of stress, fatigue, and guilt were given far freer rein. Staged discussions of working motherhood on radio and television gave voice to debilitating guilt, exhaustion, and depression as much as they did stories of professional fulfillment and lives enriched by numerous pursuits.[17]

Working parent success stories, then, were also accounts of efforts to triumph over the emotional burdens of working parenthood. In the 1990s, popular representations of working mothers routinely addressed the issue of guilt. Since John Bowlby's famous 1953 claim that children deprived of maternal attention would suffer lasting damage, working mothers had been frequent objects of public derision.[18] As late as 1979, it had been possible for Patrick Jenkin, the Secretary of State for Social Services in Margaret Thatcher's first government, to speak out aggressively against working mothers on a BBC2 *Man Alive* program entitled "Working Mothers: Should They? Can They?" According to Jenkin, "if the good Lord had intended us to all have equal rights to go out to work, he really wouldn't have created man and woman . . . these are the biological facts of life."[19]

In the 1990s, beliefs like Jenkin's continued to circulate in popular culture, but they were joined by new, more positive perspectives on mothers in paid work. Countless newspaper articles, magazine stories, television programs, and self-help books emphasized that women could combine paid work with parenting and challenged the long-standing narrative that mothers who worked should necessarily feel guilty for being away from their children.[20] Eileen Gillibrand and Jenny Mosley's 1997 guide to "sanity

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and survival" for working mothers addressed the issue in its title—*When I Go to Work I Feel Guilty*. The foreword, by Anita Roddick—the founder and CEO of The Body Shop and a working mother—stated plainly, "Let's banish the guilt. The new mantra to be heard is celebrate yourself as a working mother, and others will do so too."[21] To be a successful working mother implied cultivating the emotional fortitude to overcome outdated social expectations.

If this was principally an issue for working mothers, it was no longer exclusively so. A 1992 episode of the ITV talk show *The Time, The Place* raised the question "Can women really have it all and not feel guilty?" Although the vast majority of the discussion focused, as promised, on women, midway through the episode, host Mike Scott chimed in to say that as a father he, too, at times felt guilty leaving his kids when he went off to work.[22] Men's experiences of strain as working parents were most often framed not around guilt but around stress. In the mid-1990s, stress became a fashionable topic in the mass media as well as in discussions of labor in Britain.[23] According to a 1997 piece in *People Management* magazine, there was an epidemic of stress in British society.[24] Commentators suggested that working fathers, like working mothers, were now faced with new psychological burdens.[25] Succeeding at working parenthood would require that they, too, overcome emotional challenges.

IT'S ALL IN THE BALANCE

In advice and self-help literature, accounts of men and women navigating their lives—both the good and the bad—helped shape an image of what was possible and what working parents could and should expect of themselves and their families. If having it all despite the evident obstacles was the goal and promise of working parenthood, then finding and maintaining balance was the means to this end. More than any other concept, it was the notion of "work–life balance" and the relaxed ease that it connoted that came to define the figure of the working parent in popular culture in this period. In the 1990s, balance became so integral a part of the discourse about working parenthood that it came to mean a number of different things. To be a balanced working parent meant keeping paid work in perspective and avoiding biting off more than you could chew. It also meant striking an emotional balance within oneself and within a family—expecting neither too much nor too little.[26] While it was generally working

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mothers who were portrayed as ultimately responsible for achieving balance in their households, fathers too were expected to concern themselves with the problem of balance.

Several factors contributed to the new association between working parents and the pursuit of balance in the 1990s. The notion of seeking balance was popularized alongside the mounting discourse about stress and the rise of relaxation practices for both men and women in Britain in the postwar period.[27] By the 1990s, the labor of middle-class men and women alike was firmly associated with the need to actively practice relaxation to achieve a balanced state of being. While notions about the importance of relaxation and balance for individual well-being had support among the feminist activists who had helped to popularize the figure of the working parent in the 1980s, these activists, as we have seen, had also advocated for balanced organizations. Companies were supposed to facilitate the possibility of balanced lives for their employees through new forms of support, and they could expect to lose employees if they did not "get that balance right."[28] In other words, for feminists, balance was not imagined as the sole responsibility of individuals but as something that they could pursue within particular social, cultural, and professional contexts conducive to it. In the cultural representations of working parenthood that proliferated in the 1990s, however, it was predominately individuals and families who bore the responsibility for achieving balance.

As private employers began to address the figure of the working parent in personnel materials, internal publications, and advice literature beginning in the mid-1980s, they lauded the benefits of rigorously well-managed and balanced lives. In working parent success stories, balance became the key measure of a working parent's success even when it was acknowledged that structures of employment played an important role in shaping the possibilities for families. In August 1994, Sainsbury's *The Magazine* released the results of a survey conducted in partnership with the charity Exploring Parenthood of fourteen thousand working Britons in an article entitled "It's All in the Balance."[29] After briefly recounting the survey results, the piece went on to document the stories of "three couples who seem to be getting the balance right." What this amounted to, in practice, was a joint commitment to planning, collaboration, personal flexibility in adapting schedules and plans, and sheer force of will. In the words of parents Susan and Martin Singleton—a solicitor and teacher, respectively—the determination

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to "achieve a better balance" and being "willing and keen that everything works" were instrumental to their ability to manage their lives. So too, *The Magazine* was prepared to acknowledge, was the nature of paid employment. According to the author of the article, Adrienne Katz, "enlightened employers have realized that their staff are their greatest asset." Of the six well-balanced men and women featured in the piece, all but one worked either for themselves or for a big employer with notoriously good benefits. All were white, and just one was employed in a low-wage job.

It is no coincidence that it was through the language of balance that the concerns of working parents were most actively popularized in Briton in the 1990s. Emphasizing the problem of balance shifted the focus from the needs of working parents—a group still strongly associated with women, and indeed with feminism—to issues of lifestyle generally. This did not, as it might have done, facilitate a conversation about the experiences of nonwhite and working-class Britons who had long combined paid work with parenting. Through the association between working parents and balance, the particular concerns of the working parent became further detached from the politicized issue of gender equality and from questions of identity more generally. Tellingly, just four of the six men and women featured in Katz's piece on balance for Sainsbury's were parents. Balance was now a concern for all Britons.

If the concerns of the working parent were no longer so specific, they were nonetheless pressing. In the mid-1990s, working mothers and fathers were expected to resolve, and indeed to want to resolve, the tensions between their working and personal lives through devoted effort. They were also expected to do so together. Although advice literature for working parents did at times address the particular challenges confronting single parents in Britain in the 1990s, marital relationships tended to figure at the center of accounts of achieving balance. The Department of Health's *Working Parents Survival Handbook* indicated that it was the responsibility of both partners to juggle responsibilities and implied that sharing household work was necessary as well as appropriate. Readers were informed that finding dependable childcare, negotiating work schedules, prioritizing commitments, and managing crises were challenging but manageable tasks made the more so by emerging forms of employer and state support.

Moreover, they were tasks that could be managed without emotional friction at home. The handbook told readers that "many people look for

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partners who, as well as enjoying an emotionally intimate relationship, will be supportive of their career or work roles and share the tasks involved with home and parenting."[30] Working parents could not only be optimistic about negotiating work and parenthood, the handbook suggested, but they could also hope for an intimate and egalitarian marriage. The challenges and possibilities of marital relationships, balanced or unbalanced, formed the backdrop against which the prospects of working parents were nearly always imagined. As much as midcentury middle-class familial life had been measured against the image of the male-breadwinner family, by the 1990s, middle-class success was frequently judged against the model of the dual-income household.

GENDERED EXPECTATIONS

This by no means meant that expectations had converged for women and men by the 1990s. If successful working parenthood required successful partnership, it was nonetheless ultimately a matter of women's organization, direction, and commitment. Gillibrand and Mosley's *When I Go to Work I Feel Guilty* was typical in advising women to be ruthlessly efficient and organized household managers and to make time for everyone and everything. Mothers were expected to master the available forms of support for working parents, however spotty, to achieve at work and at home; to direct their families to participate in making it work; and to do it all with an even temper, an attractive appearance, and a smile.

The pressure on mothers to look the part of traditional feminine success remained profound. A section on "Your Appearance" in *When I Go to Work I Feel Guilty* advised readers that "if you give out a message that you do not care about yourself by wearing frumpy clothes, clashing colours or scuffed shoes, then it is likely that other people will feel the same way about you." This was followed by a flow chart asking readers to rate their self-presentation in a number of categories across the range from "spot on" to "letting me down." It drew attention to whether the reader's nails were "cleaned, filed, varnished," enquired as to whether they had updated their make-up and hairstyle in the last few years, and asked them to consider the style, age, and quality of their clothes.[31] The section stopped short of urging women to evaluate their bodies themselves for flaws, but other texts that homed in on the need for eating well and exercising hinted strongly in this direction.[32] The implication was clear: looking good mattered for the

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working mother. In *When I Go to Work I Feel Guilty* and elsewhere, the paid work of working mothers was portrayed as inseparable from their affective labor. Women were expected to maintain the same affect with their families and with their colleagues as they multitasked and assumed ever more responsibilities.

The representation of working mothers as successful workers and family members in British popular culture helped to shape an impossible new standard of success. To the extent that old expectations that mothers would stay at home with their children shifted in the 1990s, they were simply replaced by new ones. At their most progressive, commentators sometimes acknowledged that whether or not to work for pay was far from a real choice for most mothers.[33] Nonetheless, a mother picking up a women's magazine or newspaper in the 1990s would likely have found there was little consensus on the issue of whether she was expected to want to stay home with her small children. At the same time, she was now expected to want to work and to contribute equally to her household's income. For the first time, in the 1990s, an altogether new possibility emerged; middle-class women might also feel guilty for choosing not to work for pay.[34] The portrayal of working motherhood in the British media in this decade suggested nearly limitless conflicting expectations for women. One certainty underlying all of them was the reality of more labor, both physical and psychic, in the pursuit of doing it all.

In the mid-1990s calls to recognize fathers as the other half of the "working parent" gained currency in the media. New efforts on the part of feminist charities to highlight working fathers as such entered into a lively and diverse conversation about men's social and gendered roles in these years. In the 1990s, commentators reckoned with the impression that something important had happened to men and to masculinity in the aftermath of second-wave feminism and the transformation of Britain's economy in the 1980s. Journalists published accounts of men's changing experiences of full-time paid work—including long hours culture—while also drawing attention to the experiences of men who worked part time or stayed home as "househusbands."[35] The question of men's agency and choice in the matter of how, when, and where to work versus the reality of higher levels of male unemployment and a changing economy was frequently at the heart of this reporting.[36]

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Press coverage of fatherhood in the 1990s developed these broader themes about men's roles and raised fundamental questions about the very purpose of men as parents. In a world in which men were often no longer sole or even primary breadwinners, and where women continued to do a disproportionate share of household work, commentators wondered, in journalist Yvonne Roberts's words, "exactly what, in the 90s, is a father for?"[37] Questions about the relevance of fatherhood were given further life by media interest in the rise of a father's lobby for divorce law reform that aimed to secure equal custody rights for fathers.[38] The rise of a father's rights movement also introduced right-wing voices to the conversation about men's social roles, including ones that condemned feminism for stripping men of their status.

Despite the emergence of new questions about the relevance of fathers as parents, in the 1990s commentators assumed to an unprecedented degree that fathers wanted, and expected, to be involved parents and partners. In this regard, what Laura King has described as the "family-oriented masculinity" of the postwar period was accentuated in these years.[39] A picture of working fathers as involved parents, loving and attentive husbands, and emotionally intelligent communicators became a fixture of an emerging genre of advice literature for fathers. In 1999, Bounty—a promotions company and parenting club whose advice literature and product samples continue to be distributed on National Health Service maternity wards to this day—introduced a guide for fathers for the first time.[40] The Bounty guide began by congratulating new fathers on their success: "You are a hero! You're going to be a dad."[41] If working mothers faced an uphill battle to be seen as good parents, not so fathers. Bounty advised dads to be present at every step of new parenthood. It encouraged readers to recognize what they stood to gain from close relationships with children and urged them to think about baby care not as a chore but "also an opportunity." It also urged fathers to take care of their relationships with their partners. This meant, for instance, keeping in touch with them during work hours and coming home when planned.

The "Bounty Guide to Fatherhood" also addressed fathers specifically as working parents. According to the guide, being present for and engaging with the reality of a new family member required dads to rethink their relationship to work. In the words of one contributor, "when you become

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a dad, you are taking on a second job. It's a little like moonlighting. So the trick is often to cut as many corners as possible on the first money-earning job without being sacked."[42] This was striking advice given the ongoing assumption that men would be driven and successful at work and support their families financially. The guide went on to talk extensively about stress, noting that "the stress of combining job and fathering is hard." The guide also encouraged men to expect that their partners would want to contribute to the household income: "If you're both committed to sharing time with the children, it's likely your partner will want to share the breadwinning." It nonetheless imagined men as primary earners—and, as it turned out, primary rational thinkers—in families. Bounty suggested that "if she earns less than you, encourage her to train for better work. This should help your relationship." Being a good working father, in short, required renegotiating paid work and directing a household economy that would enable both parents to care for their children.

The new expectations for working fathers that circulated widely in the 1990s meant that men, too, were now assumed to be subject to the kinds of conflicts between work and family life that had long plagued women, even if the specific challenges and rewards of managing this tension were different. In a 1994 piece entitled "Daddy Stress" in *Child* magazine, James Levine acknowledged that women continued to bear primary responsibility for households and children.[43] Nonetheless, he suggested that men, too, were "increasingly torn between two sets of expectations—yesterday's view that a husband should bring home the bacon while his wife raises the children, and today's wisdom that he should share in the childrearing while being a major breadwinner, too." Levine went on to insist that the "expectation that dad will be more involved *is* the standard that today's parents aim for." In short, Levine argued, fathers, like mothers, were now subject to new pressures to do it all. This came both with the potential rewards of an enriching life at work and at home and with new pressures to perform, indeed to labor, all of the time.

BACKLASH

Representations of working parents in British popular culture in the 1990s reflected more than a decade of change in social norms for working women and men. While depictions of working mothers and working fathers emphasized the tremendous costs of trying to do and have it all, they also

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rendered the working parent, and the working couple, aspirational figures for the first time. Success stories that emphasized the highlights, but also the trials and tribulations of working parenthood, shaped a new norm of the middle-class dual-income household. By the 1990s, images of working parents and dual-income households—at once having it all and struggling to get the balance right—rivaled the iconography of the traditional male-breadwinner family in British popular culture.

The rapid rise to cultural prominence of the working parent and the displacement of the male-breadwinner family did not go uncontested. In 1990, a group of professional middle-class mothers founded the organization Full Time Mothers.[44] According to the group, the organization came about due to concern "about the relentless drive to get all mothers into paid employment outside the home and all children into third party childcare."[45] On the one hand, Full Time Mothers reflected the long shadow of Bowlby—its spokeswomen argued that small children needed their mothers as primary caregivers, and they promulgated a conservative and largely fictional vision of traditional British family life. Full Time Mothers also made an economic argument, however. The organization called for the end of a dual-income society and a return to a single breadwinner model where women were subsidized to remain at home—at least for the first three years of a child's life.[46] A decade after the organization's founding, chairman Jill Kirby, a former city lawyer and stay-at-home mother, continued to speak out against an economic reality in which "everyone has to feed a pension."[47] Implicit in the emergence of Full Time Mothers was a reaction against the new icons of smiling, professional working mothers that appeared in the media and in advice literature and against the attendant pressures on mothers to do it all.[48] While there was no exact parallel backlash among men to the rise of working fathers in British culture, we can perhaps see in the right-wing father's rights movement a similar effort to wrest back control over shifting notions of masculine and feminine roles in the family and in society.[49]

In the 1990s, working parenthood became associated with middle-class success—particularly, but not exclusively, for women. Despite pushback from organizations such as Full Time Mothers, working motherhood as it was embodied in glossy women's magazines, advice literature, and journalistic accounts of job-sharing couples shed much of its postwar stigma. Working fatherhood, meanwhile, took on real meaning for the first time as

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commentators elaborated the virtues, joys, and struggles of men who chose to combine active fathering with paid work.

II. SURVIVING WORKING PARENTHOOD IN PRACTICE

By the 1990s, Britons were confronted with gloomy as much as encouraging representations of working parenthood. If Full Time Mothers pushed back against working parenthood in part because of the daunting realities it seemed to represent, other Britons came to identify as working parents for precisely this reason. Women and men who entered the paid workplace for the first time in the 1980s did so with new expectations about their ability to combine work with family life. As Lucy Daniels, the founder of PAW, remembers of these years, "we all thought that the equal opportunities movement was done and dusted in the late 70s, and then we found that actually things were still really tough."[50] It was not only feminist activists such as Daniels who went on to spend their careers addressing the challenges of working parenthood who experienced a sense of strain and frustration in the face of the slow pace of change. Women and men like the Wilsons who wrote to the WMA about their lives as working parents in the early 1990s understood their own experiences in light of what they saw represented in popular culture, and reported feeling exhausted and overwhelmed. By capturing everyday experiences of intensified working lives, work-family tensions, and conflicting gender norms, the depictions of working parenthood that circulated in the British media in the 1990s spoke to growing numbers of ordinary Britons.

In the 1990s, British parents faced ever more intense working lives, both in the paid workplace and at home. In the absence of comprehensive state support for working families, the growing burden of paid labor confronting British parents—and in particular the changing realities for white middle-class women—represented new challenges to be managed by individual households. In practice, the division of labor between men and women shifted little in these years, and mothers continued to bear primary responsibility for combining paid work with childrearing and resolving the tensions that arose in their households. That growing numbers of Britons—including some working as well as middle-class women and men—gave voice to their struggles in the now familiar language of working parenthood reflects the degree to which the cultural icon of the working

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parent spoke to everyday experiences of stress, fatigue, guilt, and strain by the 1990s.

PARENTS AT WORK

Over the course of the 1980s, the number of women who returned to paid work within nine months of having a baby in Britain almost doubled. In 1989, 60 percent of mothers who lived with a partner were in paid work.[51] The number of mothers in the workforce only continued to increase in the 1990s. By 2000, nearly 70 percent of two-parent households had two wage-earning members, and the number of two-parent single breadwinner households in Britain had declined precipitously. Although there was a substantial increase in full-time employment for mothers—from 17 to 21 percent during the 1980s, most working mothers worked part time.[52] The experiences of white and black mothers, and coupled and single mothers, in the labor market differed, and it was predominately the relationship of white cohabiting mothers to paid work that changed throughout the 1980s. In 1981, 54 percent of black mothers were in paid employment, and this remained largely unchanged across the decade. Although as many white as black mothers worked by 1989, black mothers remained significantly more likely to work full time. Meanwhile, while single mothers had slightly lower levels of employment by 1989 than had been the case in 1981, at the dawn of the 1990s, 41 percent were employed for pay.[53]

The expanding presence of mothers in the workforce contributed to the increasing paid workload for British households across the 1980s but so too did the relative stability of male employment. In 1994, almost 85 percent of British fathers were in paid work—a figure nearly unchanged from 1984 employment rates.[54] More than half of working fathers in 1994 worked over forty hours per week, with an average of forty-seven hours per week. Fathers as a whole worked an average of four hours per week more than nonfathers. In general, fathers in managerial or professional occupations worked more hours per week than those in manual occupations. White fathers, fathers with no more than two children, fathers living in two-parent households, those with higher education, and those with an employed partner were more likely than other fathers to be in paid work. The burden of unemployment consequently fell particularly heavily on unskilled ethnic minority men. At the same time, between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s, fathers employed in nonmanual work became the majority in Britain,

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while the proportion of fathers in manual employment dropped from 53 to 46 percent.

While the gap between fathers' and mothers' volume of employment narrowed between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s, fathers continued to have the highest level of workforce participation of all working Britons and mothers the lowest—with other men and women in between.[55] Moreover, men and women continued to do different kinds of work for pay. Fathers were significantly more likely than mothers to have managerial or professional jobs and mothers to have semi- or unskilled work. Having children also continued to affect men's and women's working lives very differently as had long been the case. In 1996, a detailed government longitudinal study of the factors influencing Britons' labor market participation found that 17 percent of men surveyed reported that having a child had impacted their working arrangements. The figure for mothers was nearly two-thirds.[56] When asked how they divided up responsibility for working and childcare in their households, those who reported that having children had affected their working lives were most likely to respond that one member of the couple—generally the man—worked while the other looked after the children. In only 10 percent of households surveyed were men primarily responsible for home and children while women were the main breadwinners.[57] Despite the growing number of mothers in the paid workforce, the gendered division of labor remained firmly entrenched.

The conditions of men's work were nonetheless changing in significant ways. Although men's weekly working hours in Britain were not substantially longer in 1994 than they had been a decade previously, they were the longest worked by any men in Europe, and this attracted growing concern.[58] Britain had twice the proportion of workers working more than forty-eight hours per week than any other European Union country as well as more annual lost work time to illness and job stress.[59] British social policy makers and the charitable sector had long looked to Europe as a point of reference for developments at home, and Britain's further integration with Europe from 1992 and the specter of the European Union's progressive social legislation boosted these efforts.

Moreover, with growing numbers of mothers in work, men's long hours were increasingly a problem for middle-income as well as working-class families; nearly everyone was under more pressure. This was a fact that statistics on Britons' weekly work hours could easily miss due to the part-time

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nature of much of women's paid work. More revealing were the combined annual hours worked by men and women in Britain. These increased substantially over the 1980s—by seventy hours between 1981 and 1989.[60] By the 1990s, the decline of organized labor compounded the increased burden of paid work on Britons, parents and otherwise. Whereas 53 percent of British workers were union members in 1979, in 1999 only 28 percent of workers were in unions. By the mid-1990s, only 45 percent of Britons' wages were set by collective bargaining—down from a remarkable 70 percent in 1980.[61]

In the 1990s, middle-class mothers joined middle-class fathers and working-class parents of both sexes in paid work because they wanted to and because they had to. Although it is impossible to assess the precise motivations of mothers for remaining in or assuming more paid work, and how these changed over time, it is clear that financial pressure on families to earn increased across the 1980s in the context of a new economic climate of rising housing costs and personal debt and ever dwindling state support for families.[62] In reflecting on her work in the charitable sector in this period, Lucy Daniels recalls a noticeable change in the kinds of inquiries received by PAW:

> When we started taking calls from parents about their childcare . . . it was very much about people wanting to go back to work because they had a career they didn't want to turn their back on or they were the main breadwinner in their home or they were a single parent or whatever. But they made a choice. But over the '80s, towards the end of the '80s and early '90s, we got people in tears and really quite distressed because they had to work and they often perhaps didn't want to work, but they felt they were trapped in it because of the housing costs and the mortgages that they'd taken on board.

By the early 1990s, there was a sense that men's and women's work in Britain was out of control. In this context, the reality of more paid work for families was undeniable. In 1992 Chloe Spenser, a hospital receptionist in Teddington, and her husband John Spenser, a hospital technician, wrote to the WMA to nominate their childminder for the organization's Working Mother's Thank You award that honored Britain's growing ranks of private childcare providers. In her letter, Mrs. Spenser put the matter plainly: "Without Rashida I wouldn't be able to work. Without work we wouldn't have a home."[63]

The emerging sense that work was out of control had as much to do with the qualitative experience of the paid working day as it did with the

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necessity of work, or of particular work hours, alone. The early 1990s have been characterized as a period of significant work intensification in Britain. The globalization of lean production and its application in organizations ranging from local government and hospitals to banks and multinational corporations meant new demands on employees to produce ever-greater value per day, hour, and even minute.[64] While work intensification was identified across Western Europe and the United States in the 1990s, the highest levels—measured as the subjective experience of having to work very hard, at a high speed, or with tight deadlines—were reported in Britain.[65] National surveys of several thousand Britons of working age show that jobs requiring hard work rose more than 9 percent between 1992 and 1997.[66]

Over the same time period, women's exposure to high strain jobs rose at a faster rate than men's.[67] The pressure to work very hard grew at the fastest rate among women employed full time and was at least as pronounced in public as in private sector jobs. Unsurprisingly, the intensification of paid work had corresponding negative consequences for well-being; the proportion of Britons who were very or completely satisfied with their jobs fell nearly 9 percent between 1992 and 2001.[68] The intensification of labor regimes has been linked to declining mental and physical health alike in this period, including the erosion of sleep time.[69] That individuals with higher qualification levels were particularly likely to report work intensification points to the new forms of stress on middle-class families in the 1990s.

PARENTS AT HOME

Matters at home were not any easier for British families in the 1990s. The rise of the working parent in popular culture in the 1990s was not accompanied by a radical transformation of the gendered division of labor at home, nor was it met with a reduction in the burden of household work for families. Indeed, the domestic lives of British parents, and in particular mothers, became more intense in these years. The balance of household labor performed by men and women did shift across the period we have considered, but this was largely the result of women spending somewhat less time on domestic work rather than men doing significantly more. In Britain, as elsewhere in the West, as women assumed more paid work outside of the home, they did less domestic work. British women spent an

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average of forty minutes less on housework per day in 1985 than they had in 1975. Between 1985 and 2005, the amount of time that women spent on housework increased slightly from this low but remained below 1975 levels. Meanwhile, men assumed a greater share of domestic work than had previously been the case. Between 1965 and 2003, men's participation in domestic labor grew by 50 percent, though much of this increase happened before 1980 with the rise of family-oriented masculinity.[70]

It was therefore the case that British women continued to do a disproportionate share of household labor. A 2002 study showed that while male and female partners agreed that the women surveyed did more household work than their male partners, they disagreed about the extent of the difference. According to British men, their partners did twice as many hours of household work as they did, but according to the women, the difference was in the order of two-and-a-half times as many hours.[71] In 1994, Exploring Parenthood's survey of 14,000 Britons reported that although 71 percent of the mothers surveyed were in paid work, just 12 percent of the fathers surveyed were involved in organizing childcare. Nearly three-quarters of women with a partner who were surveyed reported doing most of the housework. Just a quarter of male respondents indicated that they shared the housework equally with their partners.[72]

Perhaps surprisingly given the extent of Britons' workforce participation, the combined time that men and women dedicated to domestic work in Britain fell by an average of just thirteen minutes between 1971 and 2000.[73] Of course, families with children had higher total hours of domestic work than those without.[74] Exploring Parenthood's 1994 study found that three-quarters of those surveyed reported having meals together as a family most days of the week, 91 percent reported having spoken to a relative not living with them in the past week, and 81 percent reported going on holiday as a family at least once per year. Lone parents were unsurprisingly under greater financial and time pressures, but their attitudes about the importance of "quality time" spent with family largely coincided with those of partnered parents.[75] Despite the changing realities of daily life for British families, parents continued to place high social value on time-intensive norms such as mealtimes together and active care for extended families.

A number of studies suggest that despite the relative stagnation of total domestic work hours in the last third of the twentieth century, the way in which men and women spent this time changed dramatically, in ways

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that made time spent at home more structured. By the 1990s, both women and men appeared to be spending proportionally more time on childcare, and perhaps even more total time with children, despite their growing paid workload.[76] In part this was a result of the fact that men's increasing involvement in domestic labor was concentrated largely around childcare and decisions about children rather than routine housework tasks such as cooking and cleaning.[77] The Exploring Parenthood study found that two-thirds of fathers reported spending an average of between one and three hours a day with their children, with a fifth of respondents reporting that they spent four or more hours. Nonetheless, most of the men surveyed indicated that they felt they did not have enough time to spend with their children.[78]

The moderate shift in the gendered division of labor at home in the late twentieth century was tied in part to new economic realities for British families. Based on a comparison of men's involvement in domestic labor in Britain and France at the turn of the century, the sociologist Rosemary Compton concluded that "men in Britain and the US . . . have been constrained to offer more domestic support to their employed partners given the lack of external supports for dual income families."[79] Because couples in France could fall back on state childcare, there had been less impetus, she hypothesized, for men to assume a greater role in the household. In short, Crompton concluded, British men had been "in a sense 'forced' into domesticity to enable their partners to work."[80] Care work was a social necessity, and the question was simply who would provide it. It remained largely women. It was also, increasingly, the private market.

The growing involvement of men in childcare, and the overall increase in the time parents spent with their children by the 1990s, reflected shifting attitudes about the role of the state in family life, about men's and women's roles, and about the role of parent. Despite the persistence of a highly unequal gendered division of labor, a large study funded by the Economic and Social Research Council on employment and the family in 2002 found that just 18 percent of Britons surveyed agreed with the statement "a man's job is to earn money, a woman's job is to look after the family."[81] Shifting family structures and marital patterns seem to have played a role in reshaping traditional attitudes toward household work in this period. There is some evidence that men living with, but not married to, their partners did a greater share of household work than their married

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counterparts. So too did men who had lived with their partner before marriage. Men with higher levels of education also tended to be more involved in domestic labor.[82]

New ideals of education and parenting that took shape beginning in the 1950s and 1960s may also have played a role in the growing proportion of time that parents dedicated to childcare by the 1990s. From the late 1970s onward, the work of Penelope Leach, the British parenting expert dubbed the "Dr Spock of her generation," gave renewed impetus to the ideal of child-centric parenting.[83] While this book has not dealt extensively with parent–child relationships, the parenting advice of this period told parents that their role was paramount to their children's happiness and success and advocated a highly involved, active, and consequently labor-intensive style of parenting.[84] If this was advice directed foremost at mothers, it also, and perhaps increasingly, reached fathers.

The poet and novelist Blake Morrison claimed to channel popular ambivalence about Leach in a piece for *The Independent* in 1994: "She makes parenthood seem hard work: she makes us worry that there's more we could be doing for our children; she makes us anxious and neurotic. But above all, she makes us feel guilty." He went on to say that "what we resent is not that she's occasionally wrong, but that she's mostly right: our priorities are wrong, but we don't know how to change them while also remaining active, wage-earning, employed. For Leach, bringing up children is at least as important as any profession, and requires that those who pursue it do so with their concentration fully engaged."[85] Across the 1980s, childrearing continued its mid-twentieth-century trajectory in assuming an ever more important cultural status, even becoming a status symbol, at precisely the moment when middle-class mothers' entry into paid work strained British family life.

Despite the stagnation in hours spent on household work between the mid-1980s and the turn of the century, there is reason to suspect that women and men alike experienced an intensification of their domestic lives over this period. The persistent social value of time spent together as a family, the new importance ascribed to intensive childrearing, and the reality that a majority of mothers were now managing household responsibilities on top of paid work seems to have endowed middle-class British homes with the same sense of mounting regimentation and logistical demands that the sociologist Arlie Hochschild identified in American households in this

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period for much the same reasons.[86] In the 1990s, the home as much as the workplace became a site of new anxieties for men as well as for women—as growing popular interest in the issue of men's stress suggests. Moreover, the now widespread popular discourse about work–life balance lacked an imaginary of selfhood or community beyond the realms of work or home. This reflected the loss of a feminist vision that support for working parents might liberate both women and men to live fuller and more equal lives.

Amid new standards and expectations of working mothers and fathers, the intensified working lives of British parents in the 1990s came at a tremendous psychic cost. On a 1989 episode of *Woman's Hour* featuring the author of the recently published *Working Mother's Survival Guide*, a group of mothers discussed their experiences of managing paid work alongside motherhood. While the tone of the discussion was lighthearted, and featured humorous references to hopelessly incompetent husbands and professional clothing smeared with baby food, the underlying accounts of strain were far from it. One mother commented that she'd recently found herself wailing on the stairs of her house and concluded that "I tend to think I'm more of a failure at home than at work."[87] In her sense of failing to meet the many demands on her, she was far from alone. A decade later, in 2001, another episode of *Woman's Hour* again interviewed working mothers about their experiences of paid work. For one mother, who had worked full time when her son was little but had since given this up, the guilt she'd experienced had been overwhelming. She'd found herself crying on the way to work and miserable when she got home in the evening to find that she was too tired to play with her son. She'd ended up taking antidepressants to cope.[88]

Three-quarters of working parents surveyed by Exploring Parenthood in 1994 indicated that they found it difficult to fulfill their commitments to both home and work. When asked to describe their feelings as parents, the most common response of 58 percent of respondents was "joyful," though this was trailed closely—at 55 percent—by "anxious."[89] Mothers who worked reported not having enough time for their families and those who didn't reported not having enough money. Parents cited financial concerns, working hours, their partner's working hours, lack of childcare, and lack of time together as a couple as their major sources of concern.[90] Some mothers also mentioned the "lack of status society gives to full-time mothers" as a cause of anxiety. Many parents reported a sense of unpreparedness

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for the challenges of parenthood. Some 64 percent of respondents said that they would have welcomed education and training in childrearing. A similarly high number indicated that they had not expected that having children would have such an effect on their relationships and sex lives.[91] What Exploring Parenthood's survey results amounted to was a cry for help. In the summation of one parent, it was the "pressure of combining work, children and self"—or, in other words, everything—that felt so taxing.

TRAUMAS OF GUILT, WORRY, DEPRESSION, AND DOWNRIGHT BAD TEMPER

It is little surprise that a growing subset of Britons embraced the language of working parenthood in the 1990s as a way to make sense of the stress and strain that accompanied their everyday lives. When a working parents support group formed in the Glaxo Group Research division of the pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline in the early 1990s, it advertised itself to fellow staff members as follows: "Are you tired, confused, stressed and have just returned to work after having your baby? Would you like to talk to others who are working parents and know what you are feeling?"[92] As had been the case when feminists first came together to organize around the challenges confronting working parents in the 1970s, in the 1990s, stress, overwhelm, and exhaustion continued to bring working parents together. Two decades later, however, an emphasis on self-help and mutual emotional acknowledgment took precedence over calls for political action in workplace parents groups.

Outside of the context of organized working parent groups, the physical and psychic toll of working parenthood was a frequent theme of submission letters to the WMA Working Mother of the Year and Working Mother's Thank You competitions. Letters to the WMA via *SHE* magazine came from women and men from across Britain. Nearly all were middle class or aspirationally middle class, but many were employed in manual and service work.[93] Of the forty-three nominations to the charity's 1992 Working Mother's Helper of the Year award preserved in the archive, nearly a third mention guilt or worry. In July 1992, a hospital librarian in Surrey nominated her "smashing father-in-law, Ken Lasater" for the Working Mother's Thank You award. According to Mrs. Lasater, her father-in-law had been "a rock of noncritical support throughout the inevitable traumas of guilt,

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worry, depression and downright bad temper which have accompanied my struggles to be the perfect career woman, mother and wife (not necessarily in that order!)"[94]

Other parents spoke of the guilt that they experienced about working when they hired childcare providers or could not seem to find childcare that met their standards.[95] The letters that working mothers and fathers addressed to the WMA in the 1990s developed the trope of the guilty, stressed, and overburdened working parent that flourished in cultural representations of working parents in these years. In doing so, they crafted stories about beating the odds and overcoming challenges stacked against them. In conversation with organizations like the WMA, which were invested in highlighting the concerns of working parents, ordinary Britons helped develop a narrative of working parenthood as a heroic enterprise, triumphed by the parent—usually a mother—who strived for perfection.

That working parenthood had come to seem like a matter of heroics and survival against the odds to British parents by the 1990s had in large part to do with the sheer exhaustion many faced in isolation from traditional, state, or employment-based sources of support for families. In her letter nominating her mother-in-law for the Working Mother's Helper award, Tina Conlan—a full-time working mother originally from Northern Ireland and living in West Yorkshire—emphasized the challenges she had experienced raising her children far away from her own immediate family. She told the WMA, "I'll never forget, just after James was born—I was frightened, tired and hurting my milk had just come in and I felt really low, Mary bathed my breasts with hot flannels to take the pain away it was so caring and so intimate." She went on to say that "once when things were really bad and I was exhausted, I drove to her home in Lincoln, dumped James into her arms and said—'I NEED sleep'—I slept all day and she took James out of the house so all would be quiet."[96] In part, what made the elder Mrs. Conlan's care so noteworthy from the younger Mrs. Conlan's perspective was that she was not her own kin. The deeply ingrained notion that working parents could, and ordinarily should, be able to manage family life on their own increased both the practical and psychic burdens that they faced.

The stories that Britons told about themselves for the purposes of the WMA's competitions revealed the degree to which many had internalized the norms of self-reliance, emotional fortitude, and adaptability associated with the cultural figure of the working parent. In nomination letters, values

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like flexibility, which first became associated with the figure of the working parent as part of a feminist struggle for more workplace support for families, perversely became individuated and reframed as key personal attributes of working parents and the individuals who supported them. Countless letters submitted to the WMA's competitions mentioned that it was their childminder, mother-in-law, husband, or wife's flexibility that enabled family life to function despite the huge challenges.[97] There were also suggestions in the letters addressed to the WMA that Britons had received the message that successful working parents were those who met their responsibilities without appearing in any way to buckle under the pressure. This, too, took on a gender-specific form. In a letter nominating her domestic helper—Norma—who was herself a single working mother of young boys, Jenny Morley in Trowbridge, Wiltshire reported that "despite the financial and emotional pressures of single parenthood, Norma is always bubbling with good humour and energy and even finds the time to look lovely, very trendy and vibrant."[98] If the ultimate measure of a working mother's success remained her attractive appearance, this was but one of a set of expectations to navigate in a world of work.

III. EMBRACING THE IDEAL OF WORKING PARENTHOOD

Writing and thinking about their everyday lives through the cultural prism of working parenthood enabled a subset of British mothers and fathers to articulate their struggles and frustrations and to commiserate and seek recognition from others. But it also served another function. As we have seen, by the 1990s, the working parent had become an aspirational as much as harried figure in British popular culture. The stories of working parenthood that proliferated in the British media inspired hope and desire, as much as exhausted self-recognition, in audiences. It was the promise as much as the pitfalls of life as working parent that saw growing numbers of Britons come to speak about themselves and their lives in these terms, and enabled parents to make sense of their decisions to accept growing burdens of work as the price of middle-class success.

In their letters to the WMA in the early 1990s, mothers and fathers wrote about the fact that they needed to do paid work, often referencing the economic context and the early 1990s recession. Just as many, however, spoke about their desire to work and to have interesting careers.[99] In

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the 1990s, working parenthood and its persistent association with working motherhood continued to hold out the feminist promise of exciting professional lives for women. As one Scottish mother who had trained as an orthopedic surgeon declared triumphantly, "When my daughter was born most of my (all male) colleagues assumed that this would be the end of my career and that I would never get back to such a demanding job, however, with Kerry's help I've proved them wrong!"[100] If it was sometimes childminders or extended family members who enabled working mothers to pursue demanding careers, as was the case with Kerry, letter writers frequently credited their partners for this support. In their letters to the WMA, Britons embraced the enduring feminist promise of working parenthood—that women could have stimulating professional lives and men could share more equally in the life of families.

At the heart of this hope was a renegotiation of gender roles and of the terms of marriage in the aftermath of second-wave feminism. Mothers who wrote in to the WMA drew attention to the ways in which their husbands had encouraged and supported their career ambitions.[101] They also highlighted the work that their partners did in the home—taking care of children and sometimes also cooking and cleaning.[102] Angela Ansley, a Lancashire mother who ran a private brain injury rehab clinic, nominated her husband Dave—a full-time hospital social worker—for the prize. Angela told the WMA, "My work has always been very important to me. . . . Dave has always accepted that he and I should be equally responsible for ALL childcare and domestic responsibilities."[103] Similarly, the fathers who wrote in to nominate their wives for the charity's award for Working Mother of the Year often emphasized the central and rewarding role that work played in their partners' lives, even while they acknowledged the reality of economic necessity in driving their households' decisions about paid employment.[104]

The letters of parents who wrote in to the WMA reveal the diverse ways in which men and women sought to navigate new gendered expectations. This was reflected first and foremost in the sensitivity letter writers displayed to questions of gender. Nearly all of the letters addressed to the WMA described those nominated for prizes as self-sacrificing. One mother of a two-year-old daughter who worked full time in retail management in Cheltenham told readers that the prospect of returning to her career had seemed insurmountable until her mother-in-law Pat had stepped in. Pat, she went on to report, suffered from crippling arthritis—but this didn't

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stop her: "Pat offers help, not for selfish reasons, but because she couldn't bear to see her son and his wife struggling to make ends meet during the recession."[105]

If writers felt that they needed to emphasize the virtue of self-sacrifice when it came to women's roles in their families, they also ascribed the quality of selflessness to the fathers and grandfathers who they nominated for awards. One mother who worked full time in Dorset as the coordinator of a national charity characteristically nominated her husband, David Tyler, for the helper award on the basis of his "unselfish views."[106] Another mother, writing from Norfolk, nominated her husband in almost identical terms due to his qualities of "unselfishness, caring, adaptability, and strength."[107] When emphasizing the selflessness of the men they nominated for the awards, mothers nonetheless made sure to emphasize—often very explicitly—their partner's traditionally masculine attributes. After extolling the virtues of her husband as unselfish during the period in which she had suffered from postpartum depression, the writer from Norfolk informed the WMA that "I still don't believe I was lucky enough to find him, and he's such a masculine man."[108] The letters addressed to the WMA in the early 1990s navigated carefully around the issue of gender in marriage as if to suggest that despite the reconfiguration of paid work, women and men still had distinctive parts to play.

Just as mothers tended to couch their praise for men's involvement in household and family life in assurances about their masculinity, so too did fathers who wrote to the WMA emphasize that their wives' commitment to paid work did not come at the expense of their involvement in the traditionally female realm of the family. As Wilf Farrow wrote about his wife Joy, a mother to three boys and a trading standards inspector, "Despite being very good at her job, and ambitious, she reluctantly turned down a chance of promotion which would have meant full-time working, because it would have unbalanced her role in the family."[109] Joy was absolutely a capable career woman, Mr. Farrow implied, but not to a destabilizing degree.

The notion of "balance" that so centrally defined the successful working parent who navigated different spheres of activity also materialized here as the balance between men and women as the linchpin of the traditional nuclear family unit. Few letters made explicit the frankest of the gender-specific mandates conveyed in the period's advice literature—that women owed it to their husbands to maintain an attractive appearance and men

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owed it to their wives to stick around and be present in the home and family. Nonetheless, implicit in the stories that Britons told about themselves in the language of working parenthood was an account of renegotiating the terms of marital life in the face of shifting expectations of men and women and shifting economic realities.

Britons who spoke about themselves as working parents often conveyed great optimism about the possibilities of marriage. This corresponded with the beginning of a gradual decline in what had been rising rates of divorce in Britain since the late 1960s.[110] While many of these parents aspired to share both paid work and the work of the home equally with their partners, few could so in practice. Instead, parents traded in the currency of appreciation. In 1992, a man who described himself as an "Australian male midwife" working in Leicester nominated his wife Ann—a nurse—for the Working Mother of the Year award. According to his letter, "she's juggled nursing in the brave new world of the National Health Service, keeping a down market House & Gardenish type home spic and span, and loving a man whose ideals overwhelm his common sense often leaving him frustrated and stressed."[111]

In a number of letters fathers seemed to address themselves directly to the 1970s feminist argument that women's roles in caring for men could register as one more piece of work at the end of the day. At best, the marital relationships of working parents could feel like deeply enriching and supportive partnerships. According to one father in Lancashire in his nomination for his wife who had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, "We try to work as partners in caring for children, the house, a large garden, two dogs, and four ducks. Alex is learning to admit when it is too much, something I see as a positive development. She has always made tremendous efforts to make time for the two of us and is now making time for herself as well." He went on to describe the way in which his wife had stepped up to support him in finding his feet, and establishing his own business, when he was made redundant just five months after the birth of their second child.[112]

In the face of new economic burdens on families, it was the promise of just such "balanced" and mutually supportive marital relationships that led some fathers and mothers to identify hopefully with the discourse about working parents. In doing so, they stomached the reality of shrinking leisure time and relentless paid work, domestic work, and self-work as the cost of an emotionally settled, apparently successful middle-class life. As

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one father, Nick Hennsley, in London, reflected on his day-to-day, "Sounds grim? Well yes, at times it can be, but, and this is why I am nominating her. Debbie is still full of fun, enjoys a good night out, is wonderful with the children, and, on top of everything else, puts up with me. Somehow, into this life of two full-time jobs (childcare and social work), there is still time to squeeze in Aerobics sessions, computer classes, swimming and the occasional Turkish bath."[113] It was perhaps the very fact that Debbie did "put up with" him that made a life of work bearable for Nick. That "the occasional bath"—with its suggestion of minor, convenient, self-indulgence—featured in a number of nomination letters suggests the narrow parameters of a life outside of labor for working mothers.

Ultimately, the notion that, banded together, marital couples could cope as working parents without further support was illusory. To the extent that mothers and fathers survived working parenthood in these years, it was in large part due to the growth of the market for private childcare in the 1980s and 1990s. This was something that the WMA was keen to highlight through its Working Mother's Thank You award. While some Britons were similarly eager to acknowledge the critical involvement of their childminders and nannies in caring for their children, as submissions to the competition attest, it remained remarkably easy to downplay the overall significance this work. In the words of one letter writer, "Our busy and exciting life is only possible because of excellent childcare from a qualified daily nanny, but the star is our working mother."[114]

Of the parents—almost without exception mothers—who did nominate childcare providers for the WMA's prizes, it tended to be the recognition that they, too, were often working mothers, and the sense of identification that this engendered, that proved key to acknowledging their work. For some writers, the importance of childcare work and the persistent gendered division of labor at home was crystal clear. As one mother declared, "Behind every successful woman is a successful supportive woman."[115] But even those who singled out the central role of childcare remained inclined to associate this caring work with women and had little to say about class and racial divides between those who employed childcare providers and childcare employees.

Of course, it was only ever a small number of Britons who actively embraced the language of working parenthood to describe their day-to-day lives in the 1990s. The notion of the working parent as it was configured

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in popular culture, as much as in workplace policy, was highly classed and racialized. Although it is impossible to know definitively, the vast majority of submissions to the WMA's competitions appear to have come from white Britons. That the notion of working parenthood spoke to a subset of working as well as middle-class Britons is suggestive of the degree to which the dual-income household headed by a happy marital couple had become a marker of economic and social status in the 1990s. While the notion of working parenthood constituted in the media and in policy steered clear of acknowledging the growing numbers of LGBT parents in Britain, it is perhaps little surprise that the right to marry became the focal point of the gay rights movement in these years.[116] In the 1990s, working parenthood remained closely associated with coupled, white middle-class mothers. It also remained closely associated with the question of guilt and, implicit in it, the presumed choice about whether or not to work. The discussions that flourished in the media about whether working mothers should or shouldn't, and did or didn't, feel guilty in these years point to the limits of the notion of working parenthood in capturing all Britons' experiences.

In 1992, ITV's *The Time, The Place* asked working mothers to address whether women could "have it all" and avoid guilt. A variety of women chimed in with their opinions. The first to speak up to encourage women to believe that they could successfully combine work with childrearing was a representative of the WMA. Asked whether she felt guilty working she insisted, "No! And I think it's a con that women should feel guilty." It was not until a black mother spoke up, however, that anyone seriously countered the point. A black mother of a six-month-old who worked full time in insurance told the audience that she did not feel guilty because she knew that going out to work was enabling her to offer her daughter the best possible life. She felt confident that the time she did have to spend with her daughter was "quality time," and she reiterated that it made no sense for her to give up a job that it had taken her years to get. It was only at this point that another white participant leaped in and—looking directly at the black mother—asked "what's more important than your child?" and demanded to know "what mother means to you people."[117] The racism and derision of black parents that persisted in British culture in the 1990s no doubt made it difficult for black parents to envision better lives for themselves and their families through the paradigm of working parenthood, even as black Britons continued to struggle—alongside growing numbers of

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white working parents—to support their families financially while caring for their children.[118]

The experiences of single parents in Britain were also in many ways at odds with the rhetoric surrounding working parenthood. In the 1990s, there were more one-parent families in Britain than ever before. While one in eight families were headed by single parents in 1980, by 1992, this number had risen to one in five. As we've seen, the relationship of single parents—90 percent of them women—to the labor market differed from that of married or cohabiting mothers. The "choice" of whether or not to work for pay for these parents was structured and constrained even more dramatically by childcare costs, the availability of state or other benefits and resources, income potential, and housing costs than was the case for two-parent families. Some single parents, particularly those employed for pay, did identify as working parents, and single mothers played an important role in the earliest forms of organizing on behalf of working parents in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Yet, other more long-standing organizations, particularly the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child (renamed the National Council for One Parent Families in 1973), organized more specifically around the unique burdens confronting single parents and offered what was perhaps a more resonant identity category for these families, even while they engaged with broader feminist calls for gender equality.[119]

IV. CONCLUSION

Over the 1990s, the figure of the working parent traveled from its feminist roots into mass culture. There it tapped into a zeitgeist rife with anxiety about economic change and changes in the labor market, childrearing, gender roles, and the stability of marriage. In this context, the cultural figure of the successful working parent—financially secure, member of a close-knit marital team, manager of a balanced household, successful worker, loving mother or father—spoke both to Britons' anxieties and to their hopes. In so far as most British parents had less and less choice about whether to work in these years, and given the high costs—both material and psychic—of divorce and single parenthood, the language of working parenthood served as a way for a group of Britons that extended well beyond feminist activist networks to make sense of their everyday lives as well as to express their

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aspirations for happier and more equal relationships. This was particularly true for working mothers, who continued to bear the overwhelming burden of combining paid work with the unpaid labor of family and households.

If the making and remaking of working parenthood had the most profound consequences for the lives of women, there is good reason to consider the emergence of working fatherhood alongside the transformation of working motherhood in the 1990s. In a 1987 interview with *Women's Own* magazine, Margaret Thatcher infamously noted that "there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families." In one sense, Thatcher's assertion was right—the family remained the fundamental organizing unit of capitalism, and in the context of the intentional erosion of public resources during—though not exclusively during—her tenure, families had no choice but to pick up the pieces. Looking not only at the experiences of working mothers but also those of working fathers sheds light on how families did so in practice. Ultimately, the figure of the working parent that gained currency in British popular culture in the 1990s represented a relatively limited reimagination of women's and men's gender roles even as it embraced the possibility, and—in some instances—the necessity, of women's paid work in the new economy. This points more broadly to the limits of second-wave feminism's success in transforming the gendered division of labor even as feminism's language entered the mainstream.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, working parenthood was once again reinvented as it became the victim of its own cultural successes. It was ironically alongside the popularization of the working parent as an identity group that the feminist politics that had initially shaped a vision of working parenthood were further obscured. In the 1990s, as we have seen, it was work–life balance, not equal opportunities or even family friendliness, that became the focus of the popular discourse surrounding working parents. Balance in this context had as much to do with individual choices and lifestyle—the costs of participation in leisure and consumption—as it did with the gendered division of labor. In 2006, a nationwide survey conducted by ICM asked five hundred British teens about their experiences of living with their working parents. A third of the teens reported that their parents were stressed, and nearly half with single parents did so. A majority expressed the wish that their parents worked less, but when asked whether they should do so if it meant having fewer treats and holidays for

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the family, they backtracked.[120] While their parents appear to have agreed about the importance of paid work, the BBC reported that by 2006 more than one-fifth of Britons cited work–life balance as the most important consideration for them—above salary—in making career choices.[121] Britons were concerned about the loss of leisure, but they had embraced a language that lacked a real vision of liberation from the day-to-day grind.

Inherent in growing identification with the figure of the working parent among Britons in the 1990s was an uncertainty about how to navigate increasing demands on their time. British fathers, and to an even greater extent mothers, were overworked and overwhelmed. This was not only the case in the paid workplace, as scholarship on the intensification of labor in the 1990s has suggested. It was also true at home, where new notions of successful motherhood, fatherhood, and childrearing, and heightened overall demands on parents' schedules made for increasingly time-poor domestic environments. That the disproportionate burden of domestic labor continued to be borne by women can perhaps help to account for the widening gender gap between women's and men's reported experiences of work intensity in their paid working lives in the 1990s. In the face of the tremendous demands on working mothers and fathers, workplaces became, more than ever, pressing political and ideological—as much as economic—battlegrounds.

The working parent success stories that proliferated in popular culture, including those coauthored by working parents who spoke in their own voices, offered audiences a variety of different takes on the new demand to do it all in the face of diminished leisure time. For the feminists who organized in the WLM in the late 1970s, the notion of a working parent represented the possibility of a world in which women and men could share more equally in all aspects of productive and reproductive life. The rise of a do-it-all culture that told women and indeed men not just that they could but that they also had to was an unforeseen consequence of a decade of compromise with neoliberal interests in women's labor.

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CONCLUSION

In late December 2017, I sat with Adrienne Boyle, one of Britain's earliest flexible work activists and a founding member of the Job Sharing Project (JSP), on her canal houseboat in Dublin's historic docklands district. Through the far window of the boat, we craned our necks to see Google's fourteen-story European headquarters (see figure 6.1). "There's not much flexible working in that one! Lights on all night, eleven o'clock, Saturday night," she mused, "It's flexible all right, but you're working 60-hour weeks."[1]

In the twenty-first century, the legacies of feminist activism for working parents are visible all around us—and nowhere more so than in the contemporary tech industry. In the 1980s and 1990s, tech was at the forefront of the new knowledge economy. The demand for highly skilled workers made companies like IBM early pioneers of "family-friendly" policies. Google's Dublin headquarters, built in 2013 and now one of the tallest buildings in the Irish capital, reflects the relatively recent globalization of a particular Californian corporate aesthetic. The company's employment practices, however, are the product of a far longer history of Euro-American feminist activism and evolving business practice.

In recent years, employment at Google has become the envy of workers across the globe for its flexibility, "family friendliness," and on-site services ranging from free meals and gyms to meditation rooms and massages.[2] At the same time, however, it has also emerged as a potent symbol for what contemporary workplaces and work culture have failed to deliver: sufficient childcare, a clear division between work and nonwork time, equal opportunities for men and women, and equal conditions of labor for all employees.[3]

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FIGURE 6.1
Google Dublin. Creative Commons.

Boyle is not alone in her frustration with the slow pace of change. Nearly all of the activists I interviewed for this project expressed a degree of ambivalence about the legacies of their activism on behalf of working parents. And that was before the profound disruption to work and childcare caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Beginning in the 1970s, Britain's deindustrialization and neoliberalization dramatically increased the importance of women's paid work for the country's economy. Amid rising costs of living and declining real wages, the male-breadwinner family wage proved increasingly inadequate to support most families, and Britons began to depend heavily on women's incomes to bolster their standard of living. The transformation of Britain's economy in the late twentieth century also drove a polarization of the labor market that increased demand for low-paid workers in the booming service industry on the one hand and highly skilled workers in the new knowledge economy on the other—a trend that drew ever more women into paid work. Meanwhile, many middle-class women who had been the prime beneficiaries of the expansion of Britain's higher education system from the 1960s had trained for, and now wanted, professional employment. As rising numbers of middle as well as working-class women remained in paid work after becoming mothers, government spending cuts began to erode the fabric of

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the postwar British welfare state. The welfare state had never particularly provided for the needs of working mothers, but cuts to social spending on health and education simply added to their burden. What resulted was a crisis of care for ever more British families.

The mounting crisis of care dramatized the persistent inequalities between men and women in the labor market and at home and became a major focus of activism in the emerging women's liberation movement. In the absence of comprehensive state support for families, British feminists advocated for new forms of provision for working mothers in both local communities and the workplace. Revolutionizing childcare and paid work to accommodate the needs of working mothers, they argued, would both level the opportunities for women and men in public life and shift the division of labor at home. Activists imagined a new model of community-based childcare in which parents and professionals would participate on equal terms in shaping new antisexist and antiracist modes of care based on the unique needs of Britain's diverse communities. They imagined model employers that would provide flexibility about work location and hours, extensive parental leave, on-site childcare and in some cases eldercare, company laundries, cafeterias, gyms, massage centers, and union offices to all workers.[4] They also imagined new modes of work like job sharing that placed qualities such as collaboration, listening, and flexibility traditionally associated with women at the center of paid work. Feminists aimed at nothing short of women's liberation and the remaking of labor, family life, and social relations of care.

While activists first advanced these new demands on behalf of working mothers, they also began to advocate for change in the name of an ostensibly gender-neutral group called "working parents." The language of "working mother" was the language of social democratic Britain—it described the allegedly anomalous but in fact commonplace situation of a mother as joint breadwinner in the context of a male-breadwinner ideal and a social welfare state. Activists drew on the language of working motherhood to challenge the persistent pressure on mothers to remain at home to care for children and to highlight women's experiences of the second shift. Yet, they increasingly also invoked the new language of working parenthood to articulate the circumstances of a very different era, which saw not only the rise of mothers' paid work but also the rise of new expectations and

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aspirations for equality between men and women in marital and family as much as public life.

In the 1970s, activists for childcare and the transformation of paid work understood the needs and interests of working mothers, working parents, and communities as fundamentally compatible. They tended to advocate for working mothers and working parents interchangeably in the context of demands for women's liberation. When they did specifically invoke the language of working parenthood, it was generally to emphasize the ability of new policies in support of workers with caring responsibilities to transform the gendered division of labor.

The emergence of political activism on behalf of working parents initially represented a relatively intersectional feminist politics. From the early 1970s onward, activists for more and better childcare in Britain comprised a broad and racially and socioeconomically diverse group of community and union activists—some but not all of whom identified as feminists. In addition to challenging the expectation that mothers ought to be solely responsible for the care of young children and highlighting women's unequal share of caring work in families, childcare activists drew attention to the racism, classism, and heterosexism inherent in Britain's existing childcare system, such as it was. Through projects such as the innovative Maxilla Nursery, they put into practice a new vision of integrated community-based childcare for people of all backgrounds. However, the varied aims and priorities of childcare activists never fully cohered, and the issue of race, in particular, remained a major point of fracture. Yet the legacies of the grassroots politics they shaped across the 1970s were evident in the intersectionality of progressive public sector employer efforts to deliver on the needs of working parents in the early 1980s. The London Borough of Camden remains a powerful example of the attempt to create and sustain integrated equal opportunities policies that positioned the concerns of working parents—both mothers and fathers—within a broader commitment to overcoming discrimination on the basis of sex, race, class, sexuality, and disability.

At the same time, however, other forms of feminist activism took shape that ultimately proved more susceptible to political reinvention in a neoliberal Britain. From the late 1970s onward, activists including Adrienne Boyle advocated for the reform of the paid workplace to accommodate the needs of working mothers. Their initial focus on job sharing as a new way of working reflected a practical desire to enable mothers with professional

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backgrounds to remain in the kinds of paid work for which they had trained as well as a utopian desire to remake the values of workplace and home alike. For a time, these ideas made headway in contexts like Camden; however, under political pressure, an emphasis on job sharing gradually gave way to a more general focus on flexibility and support for all workers, precisely as flexibility became of growing value to British business. Moreover, while activists for the reinvention of paid work were concerned from the outset with improving the conditions of labor for all working Britons, in practice both job sharing specifically and flexibility more broadly tended to reflect the concerns of predominately white middle-class and aspirationally middle-class workers.

In the early 1980s, new cuts to welfare programs, public infrastructure, and local government budgets under Margaret Thatcher deepened the crisis of care in Britain. In 1986, the political move to abolish the Greater London Council (GLC), which had heavily supported left and feminist activism in London and across Britain, marked the end of an era. Grassroots activists and the organizations they founded to advocate for the needs of women and families were left without a key source of financial support. Meanwhile, mounting concerns about a demographic shortfall and skills shortages in Britain's workforce in the context of the country's economic transformation rendered businesses increasingly interested in recruiting and retaining women workers—particularly in traditionally female-dominated industries such as retail and banking. The locus of political organization on behalf of working parents in Britain began to shift from grassroots activism to the state and private sector.

In the wake of the abolition of the GLC, influential strands of feminist childcare and labor activism became increasingly entangled with the interests of the British state and of corporations. In large part this entanglement represented a survival strategy. Organizations like the National Child Care Campaign and the Job Sharing Project turned to consulting and partnerships with public and private sector organizations to keep afloat financially. They formed new organizations—the Daycare Trust and New Ways to Work, respectively—to reflect this change in focus. Brand-new feminist organizations and projects that came together on a national scale in the mid-1980s, such as the Working Mothers Association, also defined a less radical political vision from the outset. They actively sought out collaborations with British business and courted politicians from across the political

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spectrum. As they forged new partnerships with public and private sector organizations in the mid-1980s, feminists tended to downplay the issues of race and class that had long been sources of tension in their campaigns and organizations.

Alongside feminists' growing engagement with corporations and the state in the mid-1980s came a shift in the gender politics of advocacy on behalf of working parents. Increasingly during the 1980s, activists intentionally drew on the language of working parenthood instead of working motherhood precisely to avoid a potentially inflammatory association with what remained the controversial notion of women's liberation. The Working Mothers Association's name change to Parents at Work in 1994 was an attempt to recognize the experiences of fathers who, like mothers, increasingly felt pressured to excel as both workers and caregivers. In this respect, it reflected feminists' enduring mission to challenge the primacy of women as parents, yet it also represented a broader move away from an explicit focus on women's distinctive experiences and needs in combining paid work with parenting.

It was as the language of working parenthood was evacuated of its most radical political content that the locus of advocacy on behalf of working parents decisively shifted. In the late 1980s, British businesses and multinational corporations operating in Britain claimed the language of working parenthood as their own. As major companies such as NatWest and Sainsbury's invoked the language of working parenthood to shape new family-friendly policies designed to attract female talent, they lacked feminists' most utopian hopes of transforming paid work and remaking the division of labor at home. Where they were introduced, job-sharing policies and childcare support were provided to staff selectively—often overlooking entirely the needs of low-income shift workers. Policies such as flexible work times and schedules, often touted as the epitome of family friendliness, in practice served companies very well but did little to manage caregivers' workloads or to shift the division of labor at home.

It was increasingly the private sector's cost-effective policy surrounding working parents, rather than the vision of grassroots feminist activism, that shaped the terms of the state's growing engagement with working families from the 1990s. The policies instituted under New Labour to support Britain's hard-working families are indebted in their vision and politics principally to the model of corporate employment practice.

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Despite the new significance of the private sector in driving the development of policy and practice for the group known as working parents, feminists continued to exert tremendous agency in this process. It is highly doubtful that NatWest would have implemented a maternity returners scheme and other family-friendly policies in the early 1980s without the feminist researcher Magarey Povall's pioneering efforts within the organization to highlight mothers' desires to return to paid work and to challenge pervasive manager stigma against this. Without Anne Watts's efforts at Midland Bank, they almost certainly would not have implemented one of the most comprehensive workplace childcare schemes in the country in the late 1980s. The efforts of the Working Mothers Association and later Business in the Community to generate competition among businesses hoping to be perceived as family friendly were also critically important in seeing the issue of the burdens facing workers with caring responsibilities rise to the fore in media in the 1990s.

Ultimately, the primary legacy of the invention of the working parent, shaped at the intersection of feminist activism and employment practice, was not the remaking of paid work or the introduction of universal childcare provision as feminists had hoped. Rather it was a new cultural discourse and set of expectations surrounding both paid work and family life. The policies on behalf of working parents introduced by British employers in the 1980s and 1990s largely reinforced the message that families, and in particular women as primary caregivers, remained responsible for managing conflicts between the demands of work and home. The hope of collective provision for all British families had been displaced by an emphasis on individual and family responsibility. By the 1990s, two decades of activism on behalf of working parents, changing employment practice, and the reality that a majority of mothers worked for pay placed discussions about the challenges of working parenthood at the center of popular discourse.

Amid widespread media discussions about "finding the balance" and "having it all," the working parent in the dual-income household became a cultural icon to rival the traditional male-breadwinner family before it. The white middle-class parents portrayed in the media as icons of working parental success contributed to heightened expectations for men and, in particular, women. Meanwhile, in the 1990s British parents, and especially mothers, were confronted with ever-greater workloads in the paid workplace and at home. The lives of working parents reflected increased rather

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than decreased pressures on all but a minority of British families. Nonetheless, some British mothers and fathers identified hopefully with the notion of working parenthood and its apparent promise of more equal and fulfilling lives and happier marriages.

In one sense, then, the history of the working parent is an account of the ways in which second-wave feminism proved genial to neoliberalism. The theoretical tensions and practical conflicts that long existed within feminism surrounding class and race were never fully resolved, even as activists came together—in some instances across these differences—on a new scale in the 1970s and early 1980s. The combination of declining wages and higher costs of living in the 1970s, and cuts to social spending and the local government funding that had supported left activism in Britain in the early 1980s, left feminist and community activists searching for new political and financial strategies amid escalating social need. In this context, an influential group of activists turned away from their most radical ambitions and prioritized the concerns of middle-class, predominately white parents for whom they could most readily attract funding from the private sector and state bodies now positioned to support charitable projects. While they kept aspects of their vision alive, and in some cases also their earlier campaigns and organizations, they were now beholden to a different agenda. As a consequence, working parenthood was eventually transformed from a feminist project to remake work and family into an economic project managed by corporations and by individuals.

In recent years, feminists have rightly criticized the kind of feminist politics that has aimed to secure women's representation and inclusion at the top rather than focusing on the realities confronting the vast majority of working women on low incomes.[5] Yet, in the 1970s and through the mid-1980s, when only small numbers of mothers remained in professional paid work after the birth of their children, the politics of representation mattered in a way that can now be difficult to recall. Parental leave, returners schemes, flexible work, and various forms of employer childcare support did make an important difference in the lives of some Britons and reshape workers' expectations of employers on a wide scale. In the hopeful early and even mid-1980s, it was not yet a foregone conclusion that ideas like flexible working would prove so deeply compatible with business interests in the context of a changing labor market and global political economy. Nor

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was it obvious that the language of working parenthood would be as easily invoked to obscure as to illuminate the relations of care in British society. Nonetheless, it is clear that feminists never overcame the thorny premise of choice that underscored a great deal of their activism. While some mothers increasingly wanted to work for pay, many had long needed to. An emphasis on options for parents too easily obscured the lack of choices for many families and facilitated the erosion of the principle of universal forms of social support.

If it was the case that feminism and neoliberalism had "perverse confluences," as Janet Newman has suggested, it is worth remembering that these were shaped as much by feminist agency as by the erasure of feminist politics.[6] The growth of mothers' paid work from the 1970s made the workplace one of the most important sites of politics in the late twentieth century and created new spaces for activism and resistance. Feminist activists, as much as corporations and the state, drove the gradual destigmatization of working motherhood in the late twentieth century. They were also instrumental in placing the issue of work–life conflict and the role of fathers as caregivers on the mainstream political and cultural agenda. Moreover, as the thrust of organized feminist activism for working parents shifted in Britain in the mid-1980s, this change did not go uncontested. The voices of feminists who could not countenance the pairing down of feminist platforms, or new partnerships with the private sector, are harder to track archivally in the wake of the organized women's movement. Yet they can be found in places like Camden, where feminists fought to ensure that workplace childcare places were allotted in a way that was representative of the workforce's racial and class demographics, even as spending cuts significantly eroded the material basis for childcare provision in the council during the 1980s and early 1990s.

Far more research is still needed to make sense of the complex history of working parenthood in contemporary Britain. Studying the history of activism for childcare and flexible work and the shifting nature of employment policy and practice in Britain since the 1970s required looking outside of traditional archives to oral history and to private collections maintained by activists and by the organizations that came in their wake. The experiences of childcare workers as caregivers and as parents themselves, and of ethnic minority Britons who had long combined paid work with childrearing,

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demand more exploration—including beyond libraries and official collections. The heightened expectations on working parents to excel and perform both at paid work and at home from the 1990s no doubt intersected with contemporary changes in the nature of parenting. More research is needed to understand the transformation of parent–child relationships in the late twentieth century and how they are connected to broader transformations in Britain's political economy and social and cultural life.

The history of working parenthood as a political project to remake work and family life was deeply connected to Britain's neoliberalization in the last third of the twentieth century. Yet, some of the most notable legacies of feminist activism for working parents belie a narrative that focuses solely on the relationship between feminism and neoliberalism. By the 1990s, fathers as well as mothers increasingly expected to be key caregivers for their children, and active members of households, even as the division of labor shifted little in practice.[7] British parents far removed from 1970s feminist networks came to identify as working parents as a way of seeking to navigate through the changing landscape of marital and familial relations in the aftermath of second-wave feminism. That they did so despite the fact that icons of successful working parenthood appeared to be the product of ever more labor and heightened forms of self-management is a testament to the feminist hopefulness that remained about the possibilities of remaking intimate life. The mainstreaming of the working parent did not erode all of feminism's most radical dreams.

The politics of working parenthood might yet be redeemed from its conflicted legacies. British women and men appear increasingly to expect to lead more equal lives both in paid work and in the home. Moreover, the need for parental leave, flexible and remote working, and other accommodations for workers with caregiving responsibilities are now well established on the national political agenda and in some cases are also the law.[8] The challenge for feminists remains to reunite demands for support for working mothers and working parents with an intersectional politics that looks to organizations—both public and private—to provide truly collective solutions for all families and not just policies that support white middle-class workers. It is likely that this will require a different language centered not on mothers or parents, family friendliness, or work–life balance but on care. This would involve a vision of care that understands our responsibilities to children, the elderly, the sick, and other vulnerable members of

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our communities not solely in terms of labor but as encompassing the full range of human values.

In 2023, after more than three years of pandemic disruption to everyday life, shaping a new politics of care is more critical than ever. Successive waves of pandemic lockdowns made patently clear that families continue to be expected, with few exceptions, to bear the full costs of care for dependents with little hope of social support. It also left no doubt that the benefits of existing family-friendly models of work have been unequally distributed—insulating some workers from the worst of the double shift and, in the case of the pandemic, health risks, while placing others under even greater strain.

When it comes to the matter of care for home and family, second-wave feminism is most often remembered for describing the unpaid labor that occurs in households as such. Naming this work as work remains a huge contribution to our understanding of the unique burdens confronting parents, especially mothers, today. More than three years into the pandemic, when so many parents have labored around the clock to accommodate the demands of unaccommodating employers, and the heightened needs of their families, it is in some ways hard to think of home and family life outside of the terms of labor. Yet it is neoliberalism more than feminism that has tended to profit from seeing all realms of human experience as sites of work. In the 1970s, feminists were already attuned to this problem. Many worried that labeling care for children, the sick, and the elderly as work like any other would degrade rather than elevate its status. They expressed the concern that thinking about caregiving solely in terms of labor would prove alienating. Viewing everything as work, in other words, could contribute to making it all work and therefore impossible to escape.

There is no doubt that we continue to need language to describe the obligations that still so often fall to mothers in society as forms of undervalued, uncompensated labor. Yet, we would do well to remember that caregiving is not solely a form of work but also a potential site of joy and leisure. Care encompasses the pleasure that we derive from cultivating meaningful relationships with others—pleasure that contains within it the potential for liberation. While the pandemic has taxed caregivers, it has also reminded us of this fact. The Great Resignation has shown that many are disillusioned with work and the potential of professional life to deliver on happiness. Our collective loneliness after several years of enforced separation, illness,

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and loss also reminds us of the intrinsic human value of our communities. Despite the very real traumas of the pandemic for caregivers, many women and men continue to want to have and care for children. The desire to parent should not be a source of embarrassment for those who recognize that under current circumstances, it is underappreciated and comes at a great cost. Instead, it can and should be a source of political radicalization. A politics that builds on feminism's most ambitious vision and valorizes care and caregivers in society is now sorely needed.

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NOTES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

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48. Christoph Hermann, *Capitalism and the Political Economy of Work Time* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2014), 101. On men's participation in domestic work, see also Rosemary Crompton, *Employment and the Family: The Reconfiguration of Work and Family Life in Contemporary Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Rosemary Crompton, *Women and Work in Modern Britain*.

49. See King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, c. 1914–1960*; Crompton, *Employment and the Family: The Reconfiguration of Work and Family Life in Contemporary Societies*.

50. Kristen Swinth takes up these themes in the US context. See Kirsten Swinth, *Feminism's Forgotten Fight: The Unfinished Struggle for Work and Family* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018). See also Dorothy S. Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). Historians of British feminism are beginning to engage with the history of childcare activism. See Danziger Halperin, "'Cinderella of the Education System': Margaret Thatcher's Plan for Nursery Expansion in 1970s Britain"; Stephen Brooke, "Space, Emotions and the Everyday: The Affective Ecology of 1980s London," *Twentieth Century British History* 28, no. 1 (2017): 110–142. On the diverse political, intellectual, social, and cultural aspects of the women's movement, see Sarah Browne, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014); Sue Bruley, "Consciousness-Raising in Clapham; Women's Liberation as 'Lived Experience' in South London in the 1970s," *Women's History Review* 22, no. 5 (2013): 717–738; Lucy Delap, "Feminist Bookshops, Reading Cultures and the Women's Liberation Movement in Great Britain, c. 1974–2000,"

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History Workshop Journal 81, no. 1 (2016): 171–196; Eve Setch, "The Face of Metropolitan Feminism: The London Women's Liberation Workshop, 1969–1979," *Twentieth Century British History* 13, no. 2 (2002): 171–190; Jeska Rees, "A Look Back at Anger: The Women's Liberation Movement in 1978," *Women's History Review* 19, no. 3 (2010): 337–356; Natalie Thomlinson, "The Colour of Feminism: White Feminists and 'Race' in the Women's Liberation Movement," *History* 97 no. 327 (2012): 453–475.

51. See, for instance, Sarah Crook, "The Women's Liberation Movement, Activism and Therapy at the Grassroots, 1968–1985," *Women's History Review* 27, no. 7 (2018): 1152–1168; Lucy Delap, "Feminism, Masculinities and Emotional Politics in Late Twentieth Century Britain," *Cultural and Social History* 15, no. 4 (2018): 571–893; Delap, "Uneasy Solidarity: The British Men's Movement and Feminism"; Freya Johnson Ross, "Professional Feminists: Challenging Local Government Inside Out," *Gender, Work & Organization* 26, no. 4 (2019): 520–540.

52. My research considers only a small section of the tremendous diversity of women's movement activism around questions of women's work both paid and unpaid in Britain. Campaigns such as Y Be a Wife, activist art projects including the Leeds Animation Project and the Hackney Flashers, and the extensive, often highly local childcare activism of this period warrant more attention from historians.

53. Mandler, "Educating the Nation: II. Universities."

54. Lucy Daniels, interviewed by Sarah Stoller, November 29, 2017.

55. McCarthy, *Double Lives: A History of Working Motherhood*, 7.

56. The term *second shift* was first popularized by Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung. See Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home* (New York: Viking, 1989).

57. For an example of an earlier form of organizing on behalf of working mothers, see, for instance, the archives of the Working Association of Mother's: 5WAM, TWL@LSE.

58. See Newman, "Source of Power: Feminism, Neoliberalism and Gendered Labor."

59. On the ways in which the British state targeted some parents for surveillance and reform in the 1950s and 1960s, see Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire*.

60. See Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (London: Virago, 1985); Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent, "Black Women and Health," in *No Turning Back: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement 1975–80*, ed. Feminist Anthology Collective (London: The Women's Press, 1981), 145–149.

61. On the black parents movement and black supplementary school movement, see Rob Waters, *Thinking Black: Britain, 1964–1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018); Kehinde Andrews, *Resisting Racism: Race, Inequality, and the Black*

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Supplementary School Movement (London: Trentham Boks, 2013). The collections housed by the Black Cultural Archives and the George Padmore Institute contain extensive materials on the fierce struggles of black parents against sus laws, police brutality, and racism in education.

62. On the history of lone parents in Britain, see Pat Thane and Tanya Evans, *Sinners? Scroungers? Saints? Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

63. On the contemporary crisis of care, see Nancy Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care," *New Left Review* 100 (2016): 99–117.

64. See Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940–1970* (London: Wiley, 1995); Peter Stearns, *Anxious Parents: A History of Modern Childrearing in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); Sharon Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Margaret Nelson, *Parenting Out of Control: Anxious Parents in Uncertain Times* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

CHAPTER 1

1. London Nursery Campaign, "The Do-It-Yourself Nursery," 1978, Pam Calder Personal Archive (hereafter PC Archive). See also Helen Penn, "Who Needs Nurseries—We Do!," in *"Be Realistic, Demand the Impossible": A Memoir of Work in Childcare and Education* (London: Routledge, 2018), 43–61.

2. Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and Mother* (London: Virago, 1983).

3. Pat Knight, "Nursery Rhyme," *Spare Rib*, December 1972. See also Anna K. Danziger Halperin, "'Cinderella of the Education System': Margaret Thatcher's Plan for Nursery Expansion in 1970s Britain," *Twentieth Century British History* 29, no. 2 (2017): 284–308.

4. Knight, "Nursery Rhyme."

5. Equality for Children, "Under Five and Under Funded" (Local Government Campaign Unit, 1984), PC Archive.

6. Equality for Children, "Under Five and Under Funded."

7. Equality for Children, "Under Five and Under Funded." See also Ursula Huws, "Who Cares: A GLC Guide to Finding and Evaluating Daycare Facilities for Under Fives in London" (Greater London Council Equal Opportunities Group, 1985), Pam Walton Personal Archive (hereafter PW Archive).

8. See Danziger Halperin, "'Cinderella of the Education System': Margaret Thatcher's Plan for Nursery Expansion in 1970s Britain," 20–21; Jane Lewis, "The Failure to Expand Childcare Provision and the Develop a Comprehensive Childcare Policy

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in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s," *Twentieth Century British History* 24, no. 1 (2013): 249–274.

9. Lewis, "The Failure to Expand Childcare Provision and the Develop a Comprehensive Childcare Policy in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s."

10. Stephen Brooke, "The Dalton Children's Centre and the Politics of 1980s London" (paper presented at Feminism and Politics in 1980s Britain Workshop, Berkeley, CA, March 14, 2018), 1–27. Ben Jackson's work has also begun to connect the developments of the 1980s to the social policy of the New Labour governments. See Ben Jackson, "Free Markets and Feminism: The Neo-Liberal Defence of the Male Breadwinner Model in Britain, c. 1980–1997," *Women's History Review* 28, no. 2 (2019): 297–316.

11. Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and Mother*; Matthew Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement* (Oxford: Open University Press, 2013).

12. Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (London: Virago, 1985), 30.

13. Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement*, 79–105. See also Equality for Children, "Under Five and Under Funded."

14. Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement*, 97–99.

15. Danziger Halperin, "'Cinderella of the Education System': Margaret Thatcher's Plan for Nursery Expansion in 1970s Britain."

16. Most local authorities also had rules against offering day care to children under two due to the entrenched consensus that a child would suffer without their mother's care at this early age. See Helen Penn, "Who Needs Nurseries—We Do!," in *"Be Realistic, Demand the Impossible": A Memoir of Work in Childcare and Education* (London: Routledge, 2018), 43–61.

17. Sue Owen, "Organised Systems of Childminding in Britain: A Sociological Examination of Changing Social Policies, A Profession and The Operation of a Service," PhD dissertation (UC Santa Cruz, 2005).

18. Elizabeth Urben, "A Case Study of Child-Minders in the London Borough of Camden," in *Women in the Community*, ed. Marjorie Mayo (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 45–51.

19. Community Relations Commission, *Who Minds? A Study of Working Mothers and Childminding in Ethnic Minority Communities* (London: Community Relations Commission 1975), Research Reports Volume 1, Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years Archive (hereafter PACEY).

20. London Council of Social Service, "Childminding in London: A Study of Support Services for Childminders" *Spare Rib*, April 1977.

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21. Lewis, "The Failure to Expand Childcare Provision and the Develop a Comprehensive Childcare Policy in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s," 269.

22. Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement*.

23. On the role of motherhood and childcare in the political lives of women's liberation movement activists, see, for instance, Ellen Malos, interviewed by Margaretta Jolly, October 24–26, 2010: Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project, British Library Sound Archive (hereafter BL Sound); Ann Oakley, interviewed by Margaretta Jolly, May 11, 2011: Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project, BL Sound.

24. Pam Calder, interviewed by Sarah Stoller, November 7, 2017.

25. Natalie Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968–1993* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 72. See also Martha Osamor, interviewed by Black Cultural Archives, March 2009, Oral Histories of the Black Women's Movement: The Heart of the Race, Black Cultural Archives (hereafter BCA). Osamor describes her organizing work in the council estate where she lived in the early 1970s.

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35. Catherine Hall, interviewed by Rachel Cohen, April 16, 2012, Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project, BL Sound. See also Penn, "Who Needs Nurseries—We Do!"

36. Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, 37–38.

37. Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent, "Black Women in Employment," March 1979, McKenley/1/1–8 OWAAD, BCA.

38. Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, 73.

39. Community Relations Commission, *Who Minds? A Study of Working Mothers and Childminding in Ethnic Minority Communities*.

40. London Borough of Wandsworth Social Services, "Childminding: A Working Group Report," Day Care for Under 5s Policy Review, December 1978, Research Reports Volume 1, PACEY.

41. London Borough of Wandsworth Social Services, "Childminding: A Working Group Report." See also Community Relations Commission, *Who Minds? A Study of Working Mothers and Childminding in Ethnic Minority Communities*.

42. Urben, "A Case Study of Child-Minders in the London Borough of Camden." See also Community Relations Commission, *Who Minds? A Study of Working Mothers and Childminding in Ethnic Minority Communities*, 48.

43. Community Relations Commission, *Who Minds? A Study of Working Mothers and Childminding in Ethnic Minority Communities*. On the high costs of childminding, see also Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, 73.

44. This was true of white and ethnic minority minders alike. See Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*.

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54. Peter Mottershead, "A Survey of Child Care for Children with Working Parents: Costs and Organization," May 1978, 595/4/6/3, MRC.

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57. Nursery Staff Action Group, "Nursery Workers," *Spare Rib*, December 1974.

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60. See Sue Owen, "Organised Systems of Childminding in Britain: A Sociological Examination of Changing Social Policies, A Profession and The Operation of a Service."

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62. See Owen, "Organised Systems of Childminding in Britain"; Sue Owen, "The Development of Childminding Networks in Britain: Sharing the Caring," in *Family Day Care: International Perspectives on Policy, Practice and Quality*, ed. June Statham and Ann Mooney (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003), 78–92.

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64. Urben, "A Case Study of Child-Minders in the London Borough of Camden."

65. See, for instance, Pam Calder, interviewed by Sarah Stoller.

66. Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*.

67. Catherine Hall, interviewed by Rachel Cohen.

68. This was particularly true from the late 1970s with the rise of the men's movement. On the men's movement, see Lucy Delap, "Uneasy Solidarity: The British

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Men's Movement and Feminism," 214–236; Lucy Delap, "Feminism, Masculinities and Emotional Politics in Late Twentieth Century Britain," *The Journal of the Social History Society* 15, no. 4 (2018): 571–593.

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70. Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, 37–38.

71. On the area of Northwest Kensington, see Westway Nursery Association, "Westway Nursery Association First Annual Report," 1974, Maxilla Archive, http://maxillaarchive.com/.

72. On the voluntary sector in London, see Mottershead, "A Survey of Child Care for Children with Working Parents: Costs and Organization." Other model nurseries in activist circles included Dorothy Gardner Centre, Colville Nursery Centre, Coram Children's Centre, Defoe Day Care Centre, and Kingsway Children's Centre in Camden. On Kingsway, see Kingsway Children's Centre, "Kingsway Children's Centre: Child Care Now . . . Child Care for the Future," c. 1980, PC Archive.

73. Naomi Honigsbaum, interviewed by Maxilla Archive, December 15, 2015, http://maxillaarchive.com/interviews/. See also Westway Nursery Association, "Westway Nursery Association First Annual Report."

74. Naomi Honigsbaum, interviewed by Maxilla Archive. In the early 1970s, Honigsbaum travelled to the United States to visit Head Start centers in New York and Boston. She was struck by the commitment of those working within the centers to reaching out to the wider community and returned determined to help train community members to run projects themselves. The Head Start program was launched in 1965 by the US Department of Health and Human Services to provide comprehensive early childhood education, parent services, and health services to low-income families. The program served as an important model for Maxilla.

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77. Naomi Honigsbaum, interviewed by Maxilla Archive.

78. Westway Nursery Association, "Westway Nursery Association First Annual Report."

79. Barty Phillips, "Underneath the Motorway Arches," *The Observer*, April 16, 1978, 372.216 MAX, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Archives.

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81. Mike Locke, interviewed by Maxilla Archive, December 9, 2015, http://maxillaarchive.com/interviews/.

82. Phillips, "Underneath the Motorway Arches."

83. Mottershead, "A Survey of Child Care for Children with Working Parents: Costs and Organization," 36–39.

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85. Margaret Duggan, "Children under the Motorway," *Church Times*, August 15, 1980, 372.216 MAX, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Archives (hereafter RBKC); Westway Nursery Association, "Westway Nursery Association First Annual Report."

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87. Mottershead, "A Survey of Child Care for Children with Working Parents."

88. Phillips, "Underneath the Motorway Arches."

89. Duggan, "Children under the Motorway."

90. Sarah Harrison, interviewed by Maxilla Archive, February 24, 2016, http://maxillaarchive.com/interviews/.

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92. Maxilla Management Committee, "Aims of Maxilla Nursery."

93. "The Early Years," *Maxilla Archive*, 2016, http://maxillaarchive.com/the-early-years/.

94. Suzan Rowan, interviewed by Maxilla Archive, March 15, 2016, http://maxillaarchive.com/interviews/.

95. "Tightening the Screw," *Maxilla Archive*, 2016, http://maxillaarchive.com/tightening-the-screw/.

96. Polly Toynbee, "Help Toddlers, and Then Let Students Pay Their Own Way," *The Guardian*, January 22, 2003, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2003/jan/22/comment.socialexclusion.

97. Toynbee, "Help Toddlers, and Then Let Students Pay Their Own Way."

98. Maxilla Management Committee, "Aims of Maxilla Nursery."

99. The Dalston Children's Centre, for instance, repeatedly changed premises. See Brooke, "The Dalton Children's Centre and the Politics of 1980s London."

100. Naomi Honigsbaum, interviewed by Maxilla Archive.

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101. Catherine Hall, interviewed by Rachel Cohen.

102. Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968–1993*.

103. London Nursery Campaign, "The Do-It-Yourself Nursery," 11. The guide also suggested that parents—albeit specifically minority parents—bring in materials that addressed their backgrounds, cultures, and traditions.

104. Penn, "Who Needs Nurseries—We Do!," 50.

105. Penn, "Who Needs Nurseries—We Do!"

106. Executive Committee, "Minutes," January 29, 1985, Executive Minutes 1985–1995, FCT.

107. "NCCC Meeting of Council," February 28, 1986, Council Minutes 1985–1995, FCT.

108. Executive Committee, "Minutes," June 19, 1986, Executive Minutes 1985–1995, FCT.

109. Penn, "Who Needs Nurseries—We Do!," 52.

110. Penn, "Who Needs Nurseries—We Do!"

111. Pam Calder, interviewed by Sarah Stoller.

112. Penn, "Who Needs Nurseries—We Do!," 52.

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115. Lucy Daniels, interviewed by Sarah Stoller, November 29, 2017.

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117. National Child Care Campaign, "This Paper Is an Attempt," May 21, 1985, PC Archive.

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119. Trades Union Congress, "Childcare for Working Parents: A Union Guide to Negotiating Childcare," March 1996, MSS.415/1/11, MRC; Liza Dresner, "Taking Action: Mothers Invade TUC," *NCCC Newsletter*, December 1980, FCT 1980–1985 Newsletters, FCT.

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121. Cynthia Cockburn, interviewed by Margaretta Jolly, January 13, 2012, Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project, BL Sound.

122. Penn, "Who Needs Nurseries—We Do!," 52.

123. Huws, "Who Cares: A GLC Guide to Finding and Evaluating Daycare Facilities for Under Fives in London."

124. On growing national government engagement with childcare from the late 1980s, see Ben Jackson, "Free Markets and Feminism: The Neo-Liberal Defence of the Male Breadwinner Model in Britain, c. 1980–1997," *Women's History Review* 28, no. 2 (2019): 297–316.

125. While childcare costs have always been a concern of activists, in the 1990s, the unaffordability of childcare for British families became a key theme of the Daycare Trust's work. See, for instance, Daycare Trust, "The Daycare Trust: First Stop for Childcare Information"; Colette Kelleher, "Welfare to Work," *Childcare Now*, May 1997, FCT Newsletters 1997–2001, FCT; Marion Kozak, "Childcare Now? Debating the Decade 1986–1996," *Childcare Now*, 1996, Newsletter Archives—Childcare Now, FCT; Daycare Trust, "Childcare Gaps in Facts and Figured," *Childcare Now*, Autumn 1999, FCT Newsletters 1997–2001, FCT.

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127. "Strategic Plan for Daycare Trust 1996–1998," 1996, Executive and Council Minutes 1996, FCT.

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129. "Executive Report 1986," 1986, Executive Minutes 1985–1995, FCT.

130. "Executive Report 1986."

131. "NCCC Programme of Work and Working Structures: Proposal to Be Considered by NCCC Council," April 2, 1986, Executive Minutes 1985–1995, FCT.

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137. Childminding, in particular, remained a frequent subject of coverage in the organization's newsletter. See, for instance, "The Law on Childcare and Family Services," *Working Mothers Association Newsletter*, Spring 1989, 6PAW/8, TWL@LSE; "Working for Better Day Nurseries," *Working Mothers Association Newsletter*, June 1987, 6PAW/8, TWL@LSE; Tracey Macheta, "Childminding—Not for the Faint-Hearted," *Working Mothers Association Newsletter*, 1988, 6PAW/8, TWL@LSE.

138. Email correspondence with Lucy Daniels, April 7, 2019.

139. Lucy Daniels, interviewed by Sarah Stoller.

140. Email correspondence with Lucy Daniels, April 7, 2019.

141. Victoria Bock, "Two Mothers Find a Way through the Minefield of Childcare Solutions," *Working Mothers Association Newsletter*, Summer 1989, 6PAW/8, TWL@LSE.

142. Huws, "Who Cares: A GLC Guide to Finding and Evaluating Daycare Facilities for Under Fives in London."

143. "Annual Report: Daycare Trust—National Childcare Campaign," 1995, FCT 1980–1985 Newsletters, FCT.

144. Huws, "Who Cares: A GLC Guide to Finding and Evaluating Daycare Facilities for Under Fives in London."

145. Penn, "A Dream for the Future."

146. Carol Sherriff, "Where Are out Three and Four Year Olds Now?," *Childcare Now*, 1995, Newsletter Archives—Childcare Now, FCT.

147. Owen, "Organised Systems of Childminding in Britain."

CHAPTER 2

1. See Adrienne Boyle, "Job-Sharing Workshop—Feedback," 1977, Adrienne Boyle Personal Archive (hereafter AB Archive).

2. Adrienne Boyle, "New Employment Patterns—Job Sharing," 1980, Pam Walton Personal Archive (hereafter PW archive).

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7. The Job Sharing Project, "Analysis of Mail Received over 1978, 1979 and Beg. of 1980," 1980, PW Archive; The Job Sharing Project, "Final Report: February 1980–March 1981," 1981, PW Archive; New Ways to Work, "Annual Report 1997/1998," March 1998, 6NWW/32, The Women's Library, London School of Economics (hereafter TWL@LSE).

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14. Spiegelberg, "Flexitime Policy Pays at Legal & General."

15. Chris Howell, "Women as the Paradigmatic Trade Unionists? New Work, New Workers and Trade Union Strategies in Conservative Britain," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 17, no. 4 (1996): 511–543.

16. Trades Union Congress, "Flexible Work Time: Unions' Comments."

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21. Eric J. Evans, *Thatcher and Thatcherism*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), 31.

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27. Olmsted, "Job Sharing: An Emerging Work-Style."

28. "Coast Group Finds a Rise in Workers Sharing Jobs," *The New York Times*, September 26, 1979.

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31. Pam Walton, interviewed by Sarah Stoller, November 24, 2017.

32. Pam Walton, interviewed by Sarah Stoller.

33. Pam Walton, interviewed by Sarah Stoller.

34. Pam Walton, unrecorded conversation with Sarah Stoller, June 26, 2017.

35. The Job Sharing Project, "Job Sharing: Increasing Access to Part-Time Work," *Grapevine*, May 10, 1980, PW Archive. See also Equal Opportunities Commission, *Job-Sharing: Improving the Quality and Availability of Part-Time Work*.

36. Adrienne Boyle, interviewed by Sarah Stoller, December 7, 2017.

37. Adrienne Boyle, "Minutes of the Job-Sharing Group Meeting 15th January 1980," February 15, 1980, AB Archive; The Job Sharing Group, "Minutes of the Job-Sharing Group Meeting," March 4, 1980, AB Archive; "Job-Sharing Group Meeting," April 22, 1980, AB Archive.

38. Other early participants included the following: Drew Stevenson; Helen Sunderland; Sue Ash, a single parent who shared a job at Islington Law Center with Judith

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Griffiths; Susie Parsons, who shared a job at North Kensington Law Centre; Hilary Everett; Marjorie Mayo, who shared a job with Ines Newman at the Joint Docklands Action Group; Ann Sedley, who worked for the National Council for Civil Liberties and wrote on the need for full-time employee rights for part-time workers; Ines Newman, who worked with Pam Walton in town planning and then job shared with Marjorie Mayo at the Joint Docklands Action Group; Jenny Hurstfield, who worked for the Child Poverty Action Group and wrote the booklet "The Part-Time Trap"; Rosalind Dean; Mike Coldham, a member of the Bristol Job Sharing Group; Alison McGreggor, who worked for Sheffield Council Careers Office and was involved in running and setting up a Sheffield jobs register; Ros Kane; David Clutterbuck, the editor of International Management Magazine who was interested in supporting and writing on job sharing; Sue Oppenheimer, who worked for Hackney Job Share; Hilary McAskill, a journalist; Emma McClelland; Gill Dixon; Judith Griffiths, who job shared with Sue Ash at Islington Law Centre; Lynn Brady, who worked with Sue Oppenheimer at Hackney Job Share; and Beverly Taylor, who was a town planner by training and later job shared at the GLC.

39. See Peter Mandler, "Educating the Nation: II. Universities," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 25 (2015): 1–26; Peter Mandler, "Educating the Nation: III. Social Mobility," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 26 (2015): 1–23.

40. See Adrienne Boyle, "Adrienne's Work Report: September 18th 1981 from July 9th 1981," September 18, 1981, AB Archive.

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43. New Ways to Work, "Job Sharing and Trade Unions."

44. New Ways to Work, "Job Sharing and Trade Unions."

45. See, for instance, The Job Sharing Project, "Job Sharing," 1980, 6NWW/5, TWL@LSE; The Job Sharing Group, "Job Sharing," poster, 1981, AB Archive.

46. "Woman's Hour," August 8, 1980, PW Archive.

47. The Job Sharing Project, "Final Report: February 1980–March 1981"; New Ways to Work, "Job Sharing and Trade Unions."

48. Adrienne Boyle, "Equal Opportunity: Parents and Job Sharing," April 1981, PW Archive.

49. Pam Walton, interviewed by Sarah Stoller.

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50. The Job Sharing Project, "Job Sharing," March 27, 1980, AB Archive.

51. The Job Sharing Group, "Job-Sharing Group Meeting"; The Job Sharing Group, "Minutes of the Job-Sharing Group Meeting," March 4, 1980, AB Archive.

52. New Ways to Work, "New Ways to Work: Development Plan," 1984, PW Archive.

53. On the centrality of nongovernmental organizations in the transformation of British politics in the post-1945 period, see Matthew Hilton, "Politics Is Ordinary: Non-Governmental Organizations and Political Participation in Contemporary Britain," *Twentieth Century British History* 22, no. 2 (2011): 230–268.

54. Adrienne Boyle, "Jobsharing," *Spare Rib*, June 1978. In addition to articles in the *Telegraph*, *Guardian*, and *Observer*, in 1979, the project saw coverage in the *Times*. See Lindsay Cook, "Two for the Price of One," *The Sunday Times*, December 2, 1979. The group received nearly two hundred communications referencing the article, most of which requested information on job sharing. See Adrienne Boyle, "Minutes of the Job-Sharing Group Meeting 15th January 1980," February 15, 1980, AB Archive.

55. Ann Hills, "Sidelines: Job Sharing," *The Guardian*, November 6, 1978; Hilary MacAskill, "Fair Shares for Two," *The Observer*, August 1978. The journalist Hilary MacAskill was also an early member of the JSP.

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58. See, for example, "A Job for Two," *Grapevine* (BBC Radio 2, December 15, 1981), SX 14578/8, British Library Sound Archive (hereafter BL Sound); "Job Sharing," *Grapevine* (BBC Radio 2, May 10, 1980), LCPG036K, BL Sound.

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65. Boyle, "Job Sharing: A Study of the Costs, Benefits and Employment Rights of Job Sharers."

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72. The Job Sharing Group, "Minutes of the Job-Sharing Group Meeting," March 4, 1980, AB Archive.

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"New Ways to Work Annual Report 1984–5," 1985, 6NWW/32, TWL@LSE; The Job Sharing Project, "Job Sharing Group Meeting 17.11.'81," November 17, 1981, AB Archive.

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81. National and Local Government Officers' Association, "Rights of Working Parents: A Negotiating Kit," 1979, MSS.21/1655/207, MRC.

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83. The Job Sharing Project, "Job-Sharing Group Meeting 23rd July 1980," July 23, 1980, AB Archive.

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85. Adrienne Boyle, "Worker's Report," November 18, 1980, AB Archive.

86. Walton, "Minutes of the Job Sharing Project Group on March 17th 1981."

87. Boyle, "Adrienne's Work Report: September 18th 1981 from July 9th 1981."

88. Trades Union Congress, "The Job Splitting Scheme," August 11, 1982, MSS.292D/135/19, MRC.

89. New Ways to Work, "Job Sharing and Trade Unions."

90. New Ways to Work, "Job Sharing and Trade Unions."

91. Analogous forms of labor activism were in fact cropping up outside of Britain as well in the early 1980s. See David Clutterbuck to Adrienne Boyle, June 19, 1981, AB Archive.

92. Adrienne Boyle, "Job-Sharing," March 27, 1980, AB Archive.

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96. Boyle, "Adrienne's Work Report: September 18th 1981 from July 9th 1981."

97. Adrienne Boyle, "Notes," April 14, 1981, AB Archive.

98. New Ways to Work, "News Sheet No. 2," December 1983, 6NWW/49, TWL@ LSE.

99. Adrienne Boyle, interviewed by Sarah Stoller.

100. Pam Walton, interviewed by Sarah Stoller.

101. Paul Blyton, *Changes in Working Time: An International Review* (Beckenham, UK: Croom Helm, 1985), 121–124.

102. Criticism came in particular from unions, women's and labor organizations, and the press. See, for example, Lionel Murray, "Employment Measures," July 27, 1982, MSS.292D/135/19, MRC.

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106. See, for instance, Adrienne Boyle, "Letter from Adrienne," 1980, PW Archive.

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108. Adrienne Boyle and Pam Walton, "New Ways to Work Meeting 17.11.1981."

109. See, for example, Adrienne Boyle, "Job Sharing: A Study of the Costs, Benefits and Employment Rights of Job Sharers."

110. Trades Union Congress, "The Job Splitting Scheme."

111. The program went so far as to suggest that the government's scheme might have support from unions. See *Today* (BBC Radio 4, July 28, 1982), SX 14679/4, BL Sound.

112. "Going to Work: Job Sharing," *Daytime on Two* (BBC Radio 2, November 12, 1984), ESBG605X, BL Sound. See also Jason Crisp, "Management Institute Advises against Job-Sharing Schemes," *Financial Times*, February 11, 1985.

113. New Ways to Work, "Minutes of Meeting on 20 October 1981 at 374a Upper St N1," November 2, 1981, AB Archive.

114. Pam Walton, interviewed by Sarah Stoller.

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115. New Ways to Work, "New Ways to Work: Development Plan." By 1984, NWW answered 1,200 inquiries per year and had conducted extensive project work with particular professional groups such as teachers. It operated a two-hundred-person job share register, spoke at meetings, and conducted seminars for personnel staff. It also ran sessions at union meetings and organized conferences on job sharing. Between 1980 and 1984, it saw press coverage in over seventy major newspaper and magazine stories. The organization also published six booklets plus numerous leaflets and fact sheets.

116. New Ways to Work, "New Ways to Work: Development Plan."

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123. The Job Sharing Project, "Minutes of Job Sharing Project Meeting—Tuesday 16 June at EOC London Office."

124. New Ways to Work, "New Ways to Work Annual Report 1984–5."

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126. New Ways to Work, "New Ways to Work Annual Report 1984–5."

127. New Ways to Work, "New Ways to Work Annual Report 1984–5."

128. New Ways to Work, "New Ways to Work Annual Report 1984–5."

129. See Chris Howell, "Women as the Paradigmatic Trade Unionists? New Work, New Workers and Trade Union Strategies in Conservative Britain," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 17, no. 4 (1996): 511–543. On declining union membership in this period, see John McIlroy, *Trade Unions in Britain Today* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

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136. Adrienne Boyle, interviewed by Sarah Stoller; Pam Walton, interviewed by Sarah Stoller.

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CHAPTER 3

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4. Hilary Simpson to Working Mothers Association, July 23, 1991, 6PAW/20, TWL@LSE.

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19. See, for instance, Rachael Ross and Robin Schneider, *From Equality to Diversity: A Business Case for Equal Opportunities* (London: Pitman, 1992); Tolfree, *Employment in the 1990s: Making the Best of Employee Resources*.

20. "Without Prejudice: A Guide to Camden Council's Equal Opportunities Policy," Public Relations Office, London Borough of Camden, August 1984, pamphlet 36.9, LBC.

21. Bruegel and Kean, "The Moment of Municipal Feminism: Gender and Class in 1980s Local Government." See also Peter Blake, "Peter Blake Interviews Kate Allen," *Public Eye: The Magazine of the Camden Branch of NALGO*, September 1982, LBC.

22. See John Gylford, *The Politics of Local Socialism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 50; Sue Goss, "Women's Initiatives in Local Government," in *Local Socialism?*

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25. Barbara Webster, *Bearing the Burden: Women's Work and Local Government* (London: Local Government Campaign Unit, 1984).

26. Daisy Payling, "'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire': Grassroots Activism and Left-Wing Solidarity in 1980s Sheffield," *Twentieth Century British History* 25, no. 4 (2014): 602–627.

27. Bruegel and Kean, "The Moment of Municipal Feminism: Gender and Class in 1980s Local Government." See also Daisy Payling, "'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire': Grassroots Activism and Left-Wing Solidarity in 1980s Sheffield."

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36. Keeley and Hilary Matthews, "The Hidden Majority," *Public Eye: The Magazine of the Camden Branch of NALGO*, February 1983, LBC.

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38. Jane Lewis, "Staff Nursery," *Public Eye: The Magazine of the Camden Branch of NALGO*, August 1978.

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40. "Report of the Staff and Management Services Committee," February 6, 1978, London Borough of Camden Minutes Jan–Dec 1978, vol. 15, LBC; Jane Lewis, "Staff Nursery," *Public Eye: The Magazine of the Camden Branch of NALGO*, August 1978, LBC; Chief Executive, "Staff Day Nursery—Progress Report," September 24, 1979, S&MS/79/144, LBC.

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42. Lewis, "Nursery at Last!"

43. Camden Council, "Camden Borough Guide," 1989, LBC. It first established an equal opportunities group in 1977. See Director of Corporate Services, "Review of Equalities in Camden since May 1990," March 11, 1993, JM/7/14B, LBC.

44. This policy was explicitly applied to all staff regardless of pay grade. See "Report of the Staff and Management Services Committee," April 3, 1978, London Borough of Camden Minutes Jan–Dec 1978, vol. 15, LBC.

45. Controller of Personnel Services, "Maternity Leave Scheme," July 13, 1982, JM/7/34F.7, LBC. A further extension to the maternity scheme was approved in September 1983 when the qualification period was reduced from two years to one year. See also "Report of the Staff & Management Services Committee," September 22, 1983, London Borough of Camden Minutes Jan–Dec 1983, vol. 20, LBC.

46. "Women's Committee Minutes," January 30, 1984, JM/7/34F, LBC.

47. National and Local Government Officers' Association, "Rights of Working Parents: A Negotiating Kit," 1979, MSS.21/1655/207, MRC. NALGO's activism in Camden was regarded as a model within the union more broadly in these years as workplace nurseries and the rights of working parents became agenda items at the national level as well as the subject of new negotiating kits. See also National and Local Government Officers' Association, "Workplace Nurseries: A Negotiating Kit," 1978, MSS.21/1655/207, MRC.

48. Howard Stacey, "Paternity," *Public Eye: The Magazine of the Camden Branch of NALGO*, March 1983.

49. "Without Prejudice: A Guide to Camden Council's Equal Opportunities Policy."

50. New Ways to Work, "Job Sharing and Flexible Working in the London Boroughs," April 1990, Pam Walton Personal Archive (hereafter PW Archive). The first London Borough to introduce a job-sharing scheme was Hackney in 1980. Camden was the third borough to do so, though job shares had been conducted in a number

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of boroughs on an ad hoc basis previously. Camden's borough-wide policy built on these earlier agreements. See, for instance, Guy Daines, "The Annual Report for 1979/1980 of the Libraries and Arts NALGO Departmental Committee," 36.94, LBC. The policy was also built on women employees' frustration with returning from maternity leave without guaranteed part-time options. This had been an ongoing issue within NALGO from at least the mid-1970s. See Jane Lewis, "Maternity Leave," *Public Eye: The Magazine of the Camden Branch of NALGO*, December 1979, LBC.

51. "Without Prejudice: A Guide to Camden Council's Equal Opportunities Policy."

52. Staff and Management Services Committee, "Job Sharing—6 Monthly Review," April 11, 1983, Women's Committee Minutes September 7, 1982 to December 13, 1983, LBC.

53. Camden Council, "Camden Borough Guide."

54. Camden Council, "Camden Borough Guide."

55. "Camden Council Women's Committee: What the Women's Committee Is Doing for Women in Camden," August 1983, 22.841, LBC. See also Peter Blake, "Peter Blake Interviews Kate Allen," *Public Eye: The Magazine of the Camden Branch of NALGO*, September 1982.

56. Chief Executive of the Policy Advisory Sub-Committee, "Implementation of the Labour Party Manifesto," September 1, 1982, JM/7/34F.7, LBC.

57. Camden Council, "Camden Official Guide," 1981, LBC. In the early 1980s, Camden was one of the leading providers of council day nurseries in the country.

58. Camden Council, "Camden Official Guide."

59. Camden Council, "Camden Borough Guide." See also Irene Bruegel and Hilda Kean, "The Moment of Municipal Feminism: Gender and Class in 1980s Local Government."

60. "Camden Council Women's Committee: What the Women's Committee Is Doing for Women in Camden."

61. Stewart Lansley, Sue Goss, and Christian Wolmar, eds., *Councils in Conflict: The Rise and Fall of the Municipal Left* (London: MacMillan, 1989), 12.

62. Lansley, Goss, and Wolmar, *Councils in Conflict: The Rise and Fall of the Municipal Left*, 32.

63. See, for instance, Camden NALGO, "Report of Branch Executive Committee on the Council's Political and Financial Crisis," November 26, 1987, 36.94, LBC. In November 1987, Camden's NALGO reported that the council planned a budget cut of 23 percent for the following year.

64. Lewis, "Nursery at Last!"

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65. "Report of the Staff and Management Services Committee."

66. "A Meeting of the Women's Committee Held at the Town Hall," September 7, 1982, JM/7/34F.7, LBC; Joint Report of the Chief Executive and Director of Social Services, "Staff Day Nursery," August 31, 1982, JM/7/34F.7, LBC.

67. Joint Report of the Chief Executive and Director of Social Services, "Staff Day Nursery."

68. Lisa Dulniak, "Women in NALGO," *Public Eye: The Magazine of the Camden Branch of NALGO*, December 1985.

69. Director of Personnel & Management Services, "Update on Staff Day Nursery and Kingsway Children's Centre."

70. Lesley Gilfrin, "Trouble at Nursery," *Public Eye: The Magazine of the Camden Branch of NALGO*, November 1986, LBC. Between 1986 and 1989, Camden's workforce was restructured and staff numbers reduced by over 2,000 people. By 1989, the council reported that they knew little about the makeup of the workforce. Dykes, Tony et al., "Dear Colleagues," June 1989, 36.9, LBC.

71. Joint Report of the Chief Executive and Director of Social Services, "Staff Day Nursery." On Camden's worsening financial and institutional context, see Camden NALGO, "Its Our Union—Its Your Choice," 1987, 36.94, LBC; Camden NALGO, "Report of Branch Executive Committee on the Council's Political and Financial Crisis," November 26, 1987, 36.94, LBC.

72. "The Staff Day Nursery & Employer Childcare Provision: Report of the Director of Personnel & Management Services."

73. Director of Personnel & Management Services, "Update on Staff Day Nursery and Kingsway Children's Centre."

74. "The Staff Day Nursery & Employer Childcare Provision: Report of the Director of Personnel & Management Services."

75. Director of Law and Administration, "Comments of the Director of Law and Administration, Update on Staff Day Nursery and Kingsway Children's Centres," June 12, 1990, JM/7/34F.7, LBC.

76. See HC Deb July 11, 1989, vol. 156, col. 874–99; HC Deb March 20, 1990, col. 1020–2021.

77. Nor did the change have widespread consequences for anyone. By 1989, there were only one thousand workplace nurseries in Britain, just twenty of which were in private sector companies. See Patrick Tolfree, *Employment in the 1990s: Making the Best of Employee Resources*.

78. Gilfrin, "Trouble at Nursery."

79. "Nursery to Close for Review," *Camden and St. Pancras Chronicle*, June 20, 1991, LBC.

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80. The Hopscotch nursery chain subsequently assumed use of the Hampden Centre site. Kieran Heneghan (information & records management officer, London Borough of Camden), email to author, July 11, 2018.

81. Camden NALGO, "Comments," February 12, 1990, JM/7/4E, LBC.

82. See "Job Sharing—6 Monthly Review," March 13, 1984, JM/7/34F, LBC; "Women's Committee Minutes 1 November 1990 to 19 March 1991," JM/7/34F, LBC.

83. Director of Corporate Services, "Review of Equalities in Camden since May 1990." While the combined units had had nineteen staff, the new equalities unit retained only ten.

84. Camden NALGO, "Branch AGM Agenda," November 22, 1990, 36.94, LBC

85. Andy Candler, "Whatever Happened to Equal Opportunities," *Public Eye: The Magazine of the Camden Branch of NALGO*, April 1991, LBC.

86. This was a point made by many concerned with the changes underway in local government from as early as 1983. See, for instance, Barbara Webster, *Bearing the Burden: Women's Work and Local Government*.

87. Equalities Unit, "Valuing Diversity—Policy," 1994, 36.9, LBC. The council adopted a new policy for "mainstreaming Equal Opportunities" in March 1994, framed as a corrective that would "bring equalities back into the heart of the organization." Following the merger of the various equalities units into a single unit in 1991, little had transpired until the appointment of Head of Equalities in late 1993. According to the council, this provided an opportunity to take stock. See Krishna Sarda, "Valuing Diversity: Equalities in Action," 36.9, LBC.

88. Krishna Sarda, "Heart of the Matter," *Equality*, March 1995, 20.41062, LBC. See also Fleur Chapman, "Equality Top of the Agenda with New Camden Newsletter," February 8, 1995, 36.9, LBC.

89. Camden Council, *Valuing Diversity*, 1995, 36.9, LBC.

90. Rachel Ross and Robin Schneider, *From Equality to Diversity: A Business Case for Equal Opportunities*, 50. Ross and Schneider specifically called out the policies of local authorities as prime targets for revision.

91. Rachel Ross and Robin Schneider, *From Equality to Diversity: A Business Case for Equal Opportunities*.

92. Ross and Schneider, *From Equality to Diversity: A Business Case for Equal Opportunities*, 52.

93. Camden Council, *Valuing Diversity*, 1995.

94. UNISON Branch Secretary David Eggmore to Chief Executive Jeremy Smith, "Dear Mr. Smith," February 15, 1995, JM/7/14C, LBC. The new "valuing diversity" strategy included the reduction of the target for employment of people with disabilities from 8 to 4 percent of all staff.

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95. Sarda, "Valuing Diversity: Equalities in Action."

96. Director of Law and Administration—Women's Unit, "Recruitment and Retention," January 18, 1990, JM/7/4E, LBC.

97. Director of Personnel & Management Services, "I.R. Strategy," February 13, 1990, JM/7/4E, LBC. NALGO was a steadfast opponent of compulsory work redeployment and redundancy. See, for instance, Camden NALGO, "Emergency Special General Meeting," February 1, 1988, 36.94, LBC; David Eggmore, "Council's Industrial Relations Strategy: Report of Branch Secretary," March 30, 1990, 36.94, LBC.

98. Sarda, "Valuing Diversity: Equalities in Action."

99. Chief Executive, "Valuing Diversity," February 16, 1995, Equalities Committee Minutes, LBC.

100. Sarda, "Valuing Diversity: Equalities in Action."

101. Here they may also have been referencing the controversial system of quotas sometimes associated with affirmative action programs in the United States. See Rachel Ross and Robin Schneider, *From Equality to Diversity: A Business Case for Equal Opportunities*, 51.

102. Director of Law and Administration—Women's Unit, "Recruitment and Retention."

103. Director of Law and Administration—Women's Unit, "Recruitment and Retention."

104. "Equalities Committee Minutes," March 11, 1993, LBC. In 1993, the equalities committee itself lamented that in 1990 there were thirty-one race adviser posts in Camden, whereas there were now only four equity officer posts.

105. Irene Bruegel and Hilda Kean, "The Moment of Municipal Feminism: Gender and Class in 1980s Local Government."

106. Irene Bruegel and Hilda Kean, "The Moment of Municipal Feminism: Gender and Class in 1980s Local Government."

107. Irene Bruegel and Hilda Kean, "The Moment of Municipal Feminism: Gender and Class in 1980s Local Government."

CHAPTER 4

1. "Women in Management," *Man Alive* (London: BBC TV2, December 19, 1978), SA/EMP/1/8, Sainsbury's.

2. See, for instance, Gordon Jones to Divisional Personnel Managers and Regional Personnel Managers, "Equal Opportunities," June 11, 1979, 7MPO/6, The Women's Library, London School of Economics (hereafter TWL@LSE).

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3. Peter J. Senker, *Industrial Training in a Cold Climate: An Assessment of Britain's Training Policies* (Avebury, UK: Avebury Business School Library, 1992); Personal correspondence with Val Hammond, June 13, 2018.

4. Elizabeth Willis, "The Pepperell Unit: Taking Up the Challenge," *Women in Management Review*, Summer 1985, 103–107.

5. By the late 1970s, there was already a sense that the equal rights and sex discrimination legislation lacked teeth. See Anna van der Vleuten, *The Price of Gender Equality: Member States and Governance in the European Union* (Chippenham: Ashgate, 2007), 18–19. It is also worth noting that there continued to be significant legal distinctions between men and women. See Anna Coote and Tess Gill, *Women's Rights: A Practical Guide*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 1977).

6. Lucy Daniels, interviewed by Sarah Stoller, November 29, 2017.

7. Van der Vleuten, *The Price of Gender Equality: Member States and Governance in the European Union*.

8. Rennie Fritchie, "An Audience with Baroness Fritchie," YouTube video, 29: 01, November 8, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKkFM25YGMw&feature=youtu.be.

9. Personal correspondence with Val Hammond.

10. See Helen McCarthy, *Girlfriends in High Places: How Women's Networks Are Changing the Workplace* (London: Demos, 2004); Eleanor Macdonald, *Nothing by Chance* (Tulsa, OK: Nimrod Press, 1988).

11. Other categories of parents—particularly white working-class, black, and single parents—had long been the subject of government social intervention. See, for instance, Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Pat Thane and Tanya Evans, *Sinners? Scroungers? Saints? Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

12. Aled Davies, *The City of London and Social Democracy: The Political Economy of Finance in Britain, 1959–1979* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 23.

13. Davies, *The City of London and Social Democracy: The Political Economy of Finance in Britain, 1959–1979*, 81.

14. Davies, *The City of London and Social Democracy: The Political Economy of Finance in Britain, 1959–1979*, 93.

15. Margery Povall et al., "Banking on Women Managers," *Management Today*, February 1982.

16. Margery Povall, "General Characteristics of the Bank," 1978, 7MPO/6, TWL@LSE.

17. Margery Povall et al., "Report to the National Westminster Bank on the Survey of Potential Women Re-Entrants Carried out in 1980," February 1981, 7MPO/6, TWL@LSE.

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18. Margery Povall, interviewed by Sarah Stoller, June 18, 2018.

19. Povall et al., "Banking on Women Managers."

20. Margery Povall, "Material from the Interactional Action Research Project," January 2005, 7MPO/5, TWL@LSE.

21. Margery Povall, interviewed by Sarah Stoller.

22. On Nancy Seear's advocacy for sex discrimination legislation in the House of Lords, see Van der Vleuten, *The Price of Gender Equality: Member States and Governance in the European Union*, 88.

23. The original participating banks were Societe General, AMRO, and Credit du Nord. The French bank Credit du Nord was strong-armed into participating by NatWest, with which it was linked.

24. Margery Povall, interviewed by Sarah Stoller, September 11, 2018.

25. Margery Povall, "Material from the Interactional Action Research Project," January 2005, 7MPO/5, TWL @ LSE.

26. In addition to the teams in Belgium, France, and the Netherlands, Povall had input from Swedish and Italian researchers.

27. Margery Povall, interviewed by Sarah Stoller; Anne Watts, interviewed by Sarah Stoller, May 29, 2018.

28. Margery Povall, "Material from the Interactional Action Research Project." See also "Speech," 1982, Midland Bank, 7MPO/6, TWL@LSE.

29. Margery Povall, interviewed by Sarah Stoller.

30. Margery Povall, interviewed by Sarah Stoller. See also Margery Povall, "Meeting with Keith Hillyer," March 20, 1980, 7MPO/6, TWL@LSE.

31. "Meeting at NatWest Bank," November 18, 1980, 7MPO/6, TWL@LSE.

32. Margery Povall, "Meeting with Staff Association (NWSA)," May 12, 1980, 7MPO/6, TWL@LSE.

33. Margery Povall, "Lunch on 20th March, 1979, with Gordon Jones, Anderson & Scholes." See also Gordon Jones to Margery Povall, "Dear Margery," February 25, 1980, 7MPO/6, TWL@LSE.

34. Margery Povall, "Personnell Management Conference at Heythrop," February 21, 1980, 7MPO/6, TWL@LSE.

35. Margery Povall, "Personnell Management Conference at Heythrop."

36. Margery Povall, interviewed by Sarah Stoller.

37. Margery Povall to Eileen Morley, "Dear Eileen," February 28, 1980, 7MPO/6, TWL@LSE.

38. Margery Povall, "Lunch on 20th March, 1979, with Gordon Jones, Anderson & Scholes."

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39. Margery Povall et al., "Report to the National Westminster Bank on the Survey of Potential Women Re-Entrants Carried out in 1980."

40. Margery Povall, "Material from the Interactional Action Research Project."

41. Margery Povall, "Meeting with Salter, Anderson, Scholes, and Jane Adams," April 22, 1980, 7MPO/6, TWL@LSE.

42. Povall, "Meeting with Salter, Anderson, Scholes, and Jane Adams."

43. "Is There Life after Motherhood? Yes, Say the Women Who Went Back to Work," *Bankground*, December 1984, NWB/132/14/14, National Westminster Bank (hereafter NWB).

44. "Is There Life after Motherhood? Yes, Say the Women Who Went Back to Work."

45. See, for instance, Margery Povall, Mrs. Heather, August 8, 1980, 7MPO/6, TWL@LSE; Margery Povall, Mrs. J, July 31, 1980, 7MPO/6, TWL@LSE; Margery Povall, Mrs. Diane, May 6, 1980, 7MPO/6, TWL@LSE; Margery Povall, Mrs. Carol Ann, August 31, 1980, 7MPO/6, TWL@LSE; Margery Povall, Mrs. V. M., August 11, 1980, 7MPO/6, TWL@LSE; Margery Povall, Mrs. Julie, October 7, 1980, 7MPO/6, TWL@LSE.

46. By 1990, the scheme had continued to be used almost exclusively by women. See "Question & Answer," August 1990, NWB/945, NWB; "Equal Opportunities at NatWest Bank Plc," December 1994, NWB/2775/13, NWB.

47. Margery Povall, "Meeting with Salter, Anderson, Scholes, and Jane Adams."

48. Povall et al., "Report to the National Westminster Bank on the Survey of Potential Women Re-Entrants Carried out in 1980."

49. Povall et al., "Report to the National Westminster Bank on the Survey of Potential Women Re-Entrants Carried out in 1980."

50. Jones to Divisional Personnel Managers and Regional Personnel Managers, "Equal Opportunities."

51. On Midland's experience, see Suzan Lewis, Anne Watts, and Christine Camp, "Developing and Implementing Policies: Midland Bank's Experience," in *The Work-Family Challenge: Rethinking Employment*, ed. Suzan Lewis and Jeremy Lewis (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 103–111.

52. Margery Povall, "Review of Midland Bank: Equal Opportunity Working Party," February 1985, 7MPO/3, TWL@LSE.

53. Margery Povall, "Material from the Interactional Action Research Project," January 2005, 7MPO/5, TWL@LSE.

54. Margery Povall, "Lunch on 20th March, 1979, with Gordon Jones, Anderson & Scholes." See also Anne Watts, interviewed by Sarah Stoller.

55. Anne Watts, interviewed by Sarah Stoller.

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56. "Is There Life after Motherhood? Yes, Say the Women Who Went Back to Work."

57. Anne Watts, "Managing the Future" (paper presented at European Women Management Development Conference, Hamburg, 1986). On the massive expansion of self-employment in this period, see Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900–1990* (London: Allen Lane, 1996), 381. During the 1980s, women's rates of self-employment rose by 81 percent verses 51 percent for men. By the mid-1990s, one in four of all self-employed people were women. See Helen Wilkinson and Melanie Howard, *Tomorrow's Women* (London: Demos, 1997).

58. To read more on the rise of human capital as a form of neoliberal governmentality and subjectivity, see Michel Feher, "Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital," trans. Ivan Ascher, *Public Culture* 21, no. 1 (2009): 21–41. See also Gary Becker, *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

59. The new discipline of human resource management arrived in the United Kingdom from the United States in the 1980s. The notion of HR management contained within it the idea of employees as assets or resources to be developed as well as an emphasis on motivation and commitment. Initially, British unions and scholars of industrial relations were dubious of HR thinking due to its association with Thatcherite neoliberalism. Gradually, it gained acceptance as a repackaged form of personnel management. See Bruce E. Kaufman, "The Development of HRM in Historical and International Perspective," in *The Oxford Handbook of Human Resource Management*, ed. Peter Boxall, John Purcell, and Patrick Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 19–47.

60. Lucy Daniels, interviewed by Sarah Stoller, November 30, 2017.

61. By 1987, the WMA newsletter cited financial support from Barclays, Johnson & Johnson, British Petroleum, Bank of America, Shell, Lloyds, and NatWest as well as the Department of Health and Social Security. *Working Mothers Association Newsletter*, June 1987, 6PAW/8, TWL@LSE. Two years later, when the WMA moved offices, Lloyds, Midland Bank, TSB, and IBM all donated furniture for their new space. *Working Mothers Association Newsletter*, Spring 1989, 6PAW/8, TWL@LSE.

62. See, for instance, Alison Maitland, "BT Forum to Explore Balanced Working Patterns," *Financial Times*, May 12, 1998; Alison Maitland, "Sharp Rise in Number of Women Executives: Employment Advances at Management Level Not Achieved in Boardroom," *Financial Times*, November 5, 1998; Alison Maitland, "State Is 'Best' Employer of Women: Workplace Study Finds Central Government Leads Other Sectors in Championing Female Progress," *Financial Times*, April 28, 1999; Alison Maitland, "Minister Is Loath to Regulate Work–Life Balance: Margaret Hodge Admits That Government Cannot Impose Flexible Working Practices on Employers," *Financial Times*, February 9, 2000.

63. Anne Watts, interviewed by Sarah Stoller.

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64. See Business in the Community, "Opportunity 2000: Information Pack," September 1993, SA/EMP/1/19, Sainsbury's.

65. John Adshead, "Developing a New Human Resource Strategy for Tomorrow's Society," 1989, SA/EMP/4, Sainsbury's. Emphasis original.

66. Sainsbury's Opportunity 2000 Coordinating Group, "Opportunity 2000—J Sainsbury Plc.," March 1992, SA/EMP/1/19, Sainsbury's. See also Daniel Douglas, "Working Mothers at Sainsburys: The Working Mothers Association 1991 Employer of the Year Competition," July 1991, 6PAW/20, TWL@LSE.

67. Adshead, "Developing a New Human Resource Strategy for Tomorrow's Society."

68. Press Office, "Women at Sainsbury's," May 1993, SA/EMP/1/19, Sainsbury's.

69. "Sainsbury's Offers New Childcare Benefits," January 22, 1991, SA/PR/2/1/26/6, Sainsbury's.

70. Adshead, "Developing a New Human Resource Strategy for Tomorrow's Society."

71. Adshead, "Developing a New Human Resource Strategy for Tomorrow's Society."

72. By 1995, Midland had instituted 100 nurseries, which were caring for 850 children. The nurseries were available to male or female staff, whether full or part time, who were primary carers for their children. See Lewis, Watts, and Camp, "Developing and Implementing Policies: Midland Bank's Experience."

73. Patrick Tolfree, *Employment in the 1990s: Making the Best of Employee Resources*. See also Maureen Loffil, "Midland Bank Group Nurseries Program," June 27, 1990, 6PAW/20, TWL@LSE.

74. Anne Toler, "The Boots Company Plc.: Submission for Employer of the Year Award," July 4, 1991, 6PAW/20, TWL@LSE.

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76. Feher, "Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital."

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CHAPTER 5

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74. Crompton, *Employment and the Family*, 141.

75. Katz, "The Family Is Fine, but under Pressure."

76. Hermann, *Capitalism and the Political Economy of Work Time*, 103.

77. Rosemary Crompton, *Women & Work in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 84–88.

78. Katz, "The Family Is Fine, but under Pressure."

79. Crompton, *Employment and the Family*, 156.

80. Crompton, *Employment and the Family*, 151.

81. Crompton, *Employment and the Family*, 145.

82. Crompton, *Employment and the Family*, 141.

83. Blake Morrison, "She Who Must Be Obeyed: Penelope Leach, Scourge of the Guilty Middle-Class Parent, Has Produced Another Book," *The Independent*, April 17, 1994, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/she-who-must-be-obeyed-penelope-leach-scourge-of-the-guilty-middle-class-parent-has-produced-another-1370667.html. Leach's 1977 classic *Your Baby and Child* became a key reference point for parents of this generation. On contemporary parenting literature, see Laura Tisdall, "Education, Parenting and Concepts of Childhood in England, c. 1945 to c. 1979," *Contemporary British History* 31, no. 1 (2017): 24–46.

84. On intensive mothering in the US context, see Sharon Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Margaret Nelson, *Parenting Out of Control: Anxious Parents in Uncertain Times* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

85. Morrison, "She Who Must Be Obeyed: Penelope Leach, Scourge of the Guilty Middle-Class Parent, Has Produced Another Book." Morrison was not alone in pushing back against the burdens posed by contemporary parenting expectations. See, for instance, Fay Weldon, "Scapegoat for Us All—Today's Mother Has Never Had It So Bad. Where Once She Provided Food and Warmth, Now She Must Build Character and Nurture Soul. No Wonder Women Are Opting Out," *The Independent*, February 2, 1997.

86. Arlie Hochschild, *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1997).

87. *Woman's Hour* (BBC Radio 4, July 28, 1989), BL Sound.

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88. *Woman's Hour* (BBC Radio 4, November 12, 2001), BL Sound.

89. Katz, "The Family Is Fine, but under Pressure."

90. Katz, "The Family Is Fine, but under Pressure."

91. The feminist Leeds Animation Workshop took up the theme of parental relationships after a baby in their 2005 film *Minding the Baby*. See Leeds Animation Workshop, "Minding the Baby," 2005, https://www.leedsanimation.org.uk/films/24/.

92. Slava Budin-Jones, "Parents' Support Network," 1994, 6PAW/18, TWL@LSE.

93. See, for instance, Chloe Gurrin to Working Mother of the Year award, "I write to you to nominate my very wonderful Childminder," July 12, 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE; Melanie Rowe to Working Mothers Association, "Karin Started Childminding for James," 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE; Mary Quick to Working Mothers Association, "I Would like to Nominate My Husband Gary," 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

94. Mrs. Lasater to Working Mothers Association, "I am very happy to nominate my father-in-Law," June 25, 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

95. Carly Tiller to Working Mothers Association, "Nikki," July 20, 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE; Nominator to Working Mothers Association, "Sue," 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

96. Tina Conlan to Working Mothers Association, "I would like to nominate my mother-in-law," 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

97. See, for instance, Val Harding to Working Mothers Association, "My nominee for the Mothers Help Award," July 27, 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE; Despina Diaz to Working Mothers Association, "Dear Sirs, Please find enclosed my entry," July 29, 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

98. Jenny Morley to Working Mothers Association, "Dear She," 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

99. Of the letters submitted to the 1992 Working Mother's Thank You competition, exactly the same number referenced the desire to work as referenced the need to work or the recession.

100. Sian Hanna to Working Mothers Association, "I would like to nominate Miss Kerry Anders," July 28, 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

101. See, for instance, Ansley to Working Mothers Association, "I would like to nominate my husband," July 25, 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE; Mrs. Tiller to Working Mothers Association, "I would like to nominate my husband David Shaw," 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

102. See, for instance, Mary Quick to Working Mothers Association, "I would like to nominate my husband Gary," 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE; Mrs. Ship to Working Mothers Association, "I would like to nominate my husband David Ship," 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

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103. Angela Ansley to Working Mothers Association, "I would like to nominate my husband," July 25, 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

104. See, for instance, C. P. Lee to Working Mothers Association, "Dear Sir/Madam," July 11, 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

105. Nominator to Working Mothers Association, "When I first decided to return to full-time," 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

106. Mrs. Tiller to Working Mothers Association, "I would like to nominate my husband David Shaw," 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

107. Mrs. Hayden and Working Mother of the Year award, "I nominate my husband Terry King," July 23, 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

108. See, for instance, Peter Ansley to Working Mothers Association, "I would like to nominate my husband," July 25, 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

109. Wilf Farrow to Working Mothers Association, "I am nominating Joy," 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

110. Divorce rates in Britain grew from an average of 57,089 petitions per year between 1966 and 1970 to 121,772 between 1971 and 1975. They reached a peak of 165,000 in 1993 and then declined unevenly to 128,5000 in 2007. See Pat Thane, *Happy Families? History and Family Policy* (London: The British Academy, 2010). See also Pat Thane and Tanya Evans, *Sinners? Scroungers? Saints? Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 120.

111. Mr. Welsh to Working Mothers Association, "I had to nominate a woman," 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

112. Mr. Hull to Working Mother of the Year award, "Nomination for Alex Hull," 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

113. Nick Hennsley to Working Mothers Association, "3:00 a.m. Brrr . . . Brrr.," 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

114. Mr. Hull to Working Mother of the Year award, "Nomination for Alex Hull," 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

115. April McDouglas to Working Mothers Association, "I would like to nominate my sister," 1992, 6PAW/1, TWL@LSE.

116. On gay marriage and the pursuit of familial legitimacy as a path to financial security, see Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017), 159–163.

117. "Working Mothers," *The Time, The Place* (ITV, March 31, 1992), BFI.

118. "Bridging the Childcare Gap," *Public Eye* (BBC TV2, January 26, 1990), BFI.

119. Pat Thane and Tanya Evans, *Sinners? Scroungers? Saints? Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth Century England*, 170.

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120. "Get a Life," *Panorama* (BBC TV1, January 26, 2006), BL Sound.

121. "Get a Life," *Panorama*. See also "Home Time," *Analysis* (BBC Radio 4, April 6, 2003), BL Sound.

CONCLUSION

1. Adrienne Boyle, interviewed by Sarah Stoller, December 7, 2017.

2. See, for instance, Aine Cain, "8 Unbelievable Perks That Come with Working at Google," *Business Insider*, November 17, 2017, https://www.businessinsider.com/google-employee-best-perks-benefits-2017-11. Google is also widely regarded as a pioneer in the field of people analytics. See Laszlo Bock, "Google's Scientific Approach to Work–Life Balance (and Much More)," *Harvard Business Review*, March 27, 2014, https://hbr.org/2014/03/googles-scientific-approach-to-work-life-balance-and-much-more.

3. See, for instance, Noam Scheiber and Kate Conger, "The Great Google Revolt," *New York Times Magazine*, February 18, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/02/18/magazine/google-revolt.html; Owen Thomas, "Google Daycare Now a Luxury for Larry and Sergey's Inner Circle," *Gawker*, June 13, 2008, https://gawker.com/5016355/google-daycare-now-a-luxury-for-larry-and-sergeys-inner-circle. In 2014, Google's Dublin office instituted a program called "Google Goes Dark," which encouraged staff to leave their devices at work before going home. See Megan R. Dickey, "Most Google Employees Can't Separate Work from Their Personal Life," *Business Insider*, March 28, 2014, https://www.businessinsider.com/google-employees-work-life-balance-2014-3.

4. Leeds Animation Workshop, dir. *Working With Care* (Leeds, UK: Leeds Animation Workshop, 1998.

5. Lorna Finlayson, "Travelling in the Wrong Direction," *London Review of Books*, July 4, 2019, https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v41/n13/lorna-finlayson/travelling-in-the-wrong-direction.

6. Janet Newman, "Source of Power: Feminism, Neoliberalism and Gendered Labor," *Social Politics* 20, no. 2 (2013): 200–221.

7. A large-scale study funded by the Economic and Social Research Council on employment and the family in 2002 found that just 18 percent of Britons surveyed agreed with the statement "a man's job is to earn money, a woman's job is to look after the family." See Rosemary Crompton, *Employment and the Family: The Reconfiguration of Work and Family Life in Contemporary Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 145.

8. Since 2003, British workers have had the legal right to request flexible work arrangements for childcare reasons and to have their request considered by their employer. Statutory paid paternity leave was also introduced in the United Kingdom for the first time in 2003.

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- Maternity Alliance (5MAL)
- National Council for One Parent Families (5OPF)
- Working Association of Mothers (5WAM)
- Parents at Work (6PAW)

GlaxoSmithKline Archive (GSK)

Joanna Foster Collection (JF)

Leeds Animation Workshop (LAW)

Lloyds Bank Archive (LBA)

London Borough of Camden Archive (LBC)

Lucy Daniels Personal Archive (LD Archive)

Maxilla Nursery Archive (Maxilla)

MSS.415: Civil and Public Services Officer Association

MSS.200/C: Confederation of British Industry

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595: Equal Opportunities Commission

MSS.21: Miscellaneous Series

MSS.20, MSS.389: National and Local Government Officers' Association

749: National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education

MSS.880: National Union of Teachers

MSS.292, MSS.292D, MSS.292E: Trades Union Congress

National Westminster Bank Archive (NWB)

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